

Alice
Sit-by-the-fire

A PAGE FROM A DAUGHTER'S
DIARY IN THREE ACTS

by J. M. Barrie



Samuel French

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1919BX

'HER BEAN

Comedy. 3 acts. By Sidney Howard. 5 males, 4 females. Interior. Modern costumes.

Produced by Gilbert Miller in New York and elsewhere, this is one of the outstanding successes of the theater season of 1932-33. The comedy has to do with a family of New Englanders who have, years before, given refuge to a great artist. The play opens some years after Bean's death, with an excited world in pursuit of his work and any details they can gather as to his life and character. Dr. Haggett and his family, who have some of Bean's canvases, suddenly realize their value, and become hard, selfish, and ill-tempered. It is, however, Abby, the family servant, who ultimately holds them all in her power: she has one of his greatest paintings, which she cannot be persuaded into selling or giving away; it turns out that she is the only one who really understood and appreciated the artist—besides, she had been married to him. An ideal play for colleges and Little Theaters.

(Royalty, \$25.00.)

THE MALE ANIMAL

Comedy. 3 acts. By James Thurber and Elliot Nugent. 8 males, 5 females. Interior. Modern costumes.

A smash hit in New York City. Tommy Turner has been married for ten years to Ellen, and he is quietly settled in a nice comfortable teaching job at Mid-Western University. But this is the week-end of the Michigan game, and Joe Ferguson, the greatest football hero Mid-Western ever had, comes to town, and of course, sees Ellen to whom he used to be sort of unofficially engaged. In addition Tommy, because he wants to read a letter to his composition class written by Vanzetti is about to have to join the ranks of the martyrs who got fired because the trustees are shouting "Red!" so loud they can't hear an idea tinkle. Eventually Tommy challenges Joe to fisticuffs. Also, he refuses to deny that he will read the Vanzetti letter and decides to stand on his principle of the freedom of ideas and the right to teach the young to think. Ellen now sees that he is a pretty good example of the male animal, and stands up with him. ". . . dismisses you from the theatre in a spirit of dazed hilarity."—N. Y. *Times*.

(Royalty, \$50.00.)

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ALICE SIT-BY-THE-FIRE

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ALICE SIT-BY-THE-FIRE

STORY OF THE PLAY

The ever-delightful classic with the star-studded history, which was produced by Charles Frohman at the Criterion Theatre, New York, on Christmas day, 1905, and which has always been a triumphant play for the talents of the greatest ladies of the theatre, from Ethel Barrymore down to Helen Hayes. Alice is the central figure who returns from India to England with her husband, and has the problem of readapting herself to the home and children she had left behind. Her highly imaginative daughter, Amy, misunderstands her coquetish remark to a dear family friend, and believes her mother is to have a rendezvous with him. In a grand gesture, Amy decides to sacrifice herself and meet the "lover" first. When Alice finds her daughter's glove in the friend's apartment, she is horrified; and now mother and daughter fear for each other, while the poor friend is completely at sea. So too is Alice's husband. But they finally unravel the mistaken affair without offending the sensitive imagination of Amy.

ALICE SIT-BY-THE-FIRE

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance.)

AMY GREY
COSMO GREY
*GINEVRA DUNBAR
FANNY
NURSE
MRS. GREY (ALICE)
COLONEL GREY
STEVE ROLLO
RICHARDSON

ACT ONE: *The dining room of the Grey's home in London. Afternoon.*

ACT TWO: *Steve Rollo's rooms in Kensington. The same evening.*

ACT THREE: *The same as Act I. Later, the same night.*

*Called "Leonora" in the American production.

Alice Sit-by-the-Fire. Play in three Acts by J. M. Barrie. Produced by Charles Frohman at the Criterion Theatre, New York, December 25, 1905.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MRS. GREY*Ethel Barrymore*
AMY GREY*Beatrice Agnew*
STEPHEN ROLLO*John Barrymore*
*LEONORA DUNBAR*Mary Nash*
COLONEL GREY*Bruce McRae*
COSMO GREY*Cyril Smith*
FANNY*Florence Busby*
RICHARDSON*Lillian Reed*
NURSE*May Davenport Seymour*

*Called *Ginevra* in the London production.

Alice Sit-by-the-fire

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The living room of the Grey's home in London.*

An afternoon in autumn, 1905.

The house is situated in a suburb not far from Kensington. The room is, strictly speaking, the dining-room, but it is used at present as a sitting-room also, "until the drawing-room is furnished."

The general effect is of a comfortable, much-lived-in room bearing strong traces of a mistress who avidly devours those ladies' journals which explain how the home may be made beautiful with hand-painting, hand-carving, poker-work, and other manifestations of the cheap artistic. It also suggests that the presiding craftswoman frequently jumps from one form of decoration to another, leaving the last one in a state of semi-completion. The oval table at Right Center with the down-stage flap folded down, is partially painted florally, the remainder of the flap having the blossoms merely sketched in. The dark wood carved chair Left of the table is half enamelled in white. The cushions, chair and sofa draperies have been similarly treated. The pictures are sketches and water-colours done by a school-girl hand, their frames being constructed of fire-cones glued together, or wrought in limp plaited straw. Small tables, stools, the mantelpiece are all evidence of the same uncertainty of artistic purpose. In the corner up Right are shelves, decreasing in size as they go up, and draped with Oriental cloths.

All the doors are decoratively curtained in like style. The door at the back Left Center leads to the hall, and when open gives a glimpse of the staircase. Another door at the back Right Center leads from the hall to the rooms at the back of the house. A third door, in the Center of the Right wall, leads to the nursery.

The fire-place is at Left. Before it, a long low fire-stool. Above it, at right angles, a sofa, with a small table above this. The piano is at the back, Center, the top of which is dressed with miscellany of domestic articles such as a tea-caddy, keys, tradesmens' books, as well as a photograph or two and a vase of autumn flowers. The remainder of the furniture and other details will be found in the furniture plot.

When the Curtain rises, AMY GREY, a charming if somewhat intense girl of seventeen, is seated on the fire-stool, wearing a dressing jacket. She has just washed her hair, which is down, and she is now in the drying process, leaning back towards the fire at a precarious angle. A towel is draped about her shoulders. A hair brush and a comb, in a decorative cloth bag, are on the stool. Seated in the chair Center, at the Left end of the oval table, is AMY'S brother, COSMO. He is about thirteen years of age and wears the uniform of a cadet in the Royal Navy. He holds a telegram, and is plunged in gloom.

After a moment, AMY straightens up, turns, and kneels on the fire-stool, bending forward to dry the top of her head.

COSMO. (*Jumping up and moving round to above his chair*) All I can say is, if father tries to kiss me I shall kick him.

AMY. (*Turning*) Oh, Cosmo!

(FANNY, the maid, enters up Left Center and stands Right of the door.)

FANNY. Miss Dunbar.

(AMY rises, flings the towel on to the sofa, and moves below it to greet her friend. GINEVRA DUNBAR enters. She is a girl of about the same age as AMY, of similar character but not so timid. The two are "friends till death" and very intense about it. COSMO gives the visitor a naval salute. FANNY exits, closing the door.)

GINEVRA. (Moving down Left Center) Amy!

AMY. (As they meet) Ginevra—my beloved!

(They embrace.)

GINEVRA. Oh, my Amy! My better self!

AMY. My other me! (They kiss on both cheeks and gaze at each other. COSMO grins, as boys will, at this mutual adoration) Are you well, Ginevra?

GINEVRA. Quite well. How did my Amy sleep?

AMY. I had a good night.

GINEVRA. (Putting her things down on the sofa arm) I'm so glad. (They put their arms round each other, and then perceive that COSMO is grinning at them. GINEVRA moves haughtily down Left to the fireplace. The look that AMY gives COSMO is a suggestion that he should retreat. He turns, and goes off up Right Center. The girls wait until he has closed the door. AMY goes up to make sure that he is not listening outside, and returns Left Center, to GINEVRA) Amy—shall we go to another tonight? (She eases to below the sofa.)

AMY. (Quailing a little) Another theatre? (She crosses to the fireside stool, picks up her hair brush, then turns) Ginevra—that would be five in one week.

GINEVRA. (Sitting on the sofa) Yes, but it is only eight in seventeen years.

AMY. And they have taught us so much, haven't they? (She sits Left of GINEVRA) Until Monday, dear,

when we went to our first *real* play, we didn't know what Life is.

GINEVRA. We were two raw, unbleached schoolgirls, Amy—absolutely *unbleached*.

AMY. You are right, Ginevra, but we have made up for lost time. Every night since then, including the matinee, has been a *revelation*. (*She puts the towel over her hair like a shawl.*)

GINEVRA. That scene, Amy, when the foolish lady visits the man—in his *rooms!*

AMY. Of course, *we* know that she only wanted to get back her letters—but I trembled for her.

GINEVRA. I was strangely calm.

AMY. I had a presentiment that the husband would follow. And when he knocked at the door—Ginevra, *you* trembled then!

GINEVRA. Not even then. Somehow I felt that the lady friend would step out from somewhere and pretend that the letters were from her. Oh! How I like that bit when she says with noble self-sacrifice, "He is my affianced husband!"

AMY. Isn't it glorious! (*After a moment's thought*) Strange that it happened in each play.

GINEVRA. That is because we always went to the *thinking* theatres. Real plays are always about a lady and two men, and, alas, only one of them is her husband. That's life, you know. It's called the odd, odd triangle.

AMY. (*Timidly*) Yes, I know. (*Appealingly*) Ginevra, I hope it wasn't *wrong* of me to go. A month ago I was only a schoolgirl.

GINEVRA. We both were.

AMY. Yes, but you are now an art student in lodgings, with a latchkey of your own— (*She removes the shawl from her hair*) —while I am awaiting the return from India of parents I have not seen for years. (*Brushing her hair*) I have had a brother and a sister to—to form.

GINEVRA. You must leave it to the Navy, dear, to form Cosmo—if it can. And as the sister is only a baby,

time enough to form her when she can exit from a pram.

AMY. (*Putting down her brush*) Darling Ginevra—all I ask is to be allowed to do my duty.

GINEVRA. Your duty is to be able to help your' parents in every way when they return. Your mother, having been so long in India, can know little about Life; how sweet, then, to be able to place your knowledge at her feet.

AMY. I had thought of that, dearest.

GINEVRA. Then, Amy, it would be simply wrong of us *not* to go to another theatre tonight. I have three and ninepence, and so, if you can scrape together one and threepence—

AMY. Generous girl—it cannot be.

GINEVRA. Why not?

(*COSMO re-enters up Right Center with the telegram, an A. B. C. railway guide, and his naval cap.*)

AMY. Cosmo, show Miss Dunbar the telegram. (*She does her hair in the towel, turban fashion.*)

(*COSMO moves to the sofa and hands GINEVRA the telegram.*)

GINEVRA. (*Reading*) “Boat arrived Southampton this morning—” (*She looks at AMY, dismayed.*)

AMY. A day earlier than they expected.

GINEVRA. (*Continuing to read*) “—hope to reach our pets this afternoon. Kisses from both to all—deliriously excited. Mummy and Dad.”

COSMO. (*Crossing to above the table Right Center*) “Pets”! “Kisses”! What can the telegraph people think? (*He puts the A. B. C. on the table.*)

AMY. (*Rising*) Surely you want to kiss your mother.

COSMO. (*Stouily*) I'm going to kiss *her*. I mean to do it. But it's father I'm worrying about it. I tell you, if *he* comes slobbering over me, I'll surprise him—

(The front door is heard to slam. For a moment, COSMO and AMY are very still, looking towards the door up Left Center. GINEVRA rises. Then AMY rushes off up Left Center, putting her brush on the sofa table en route. GINEVRA follows, more sedately, and peeps out. COSMO, working Right of the table, rehearses the greeting with which he means to ward off the fatal blow.)

COSMO. *(With hand-shakes in the air, etc)* How are you, Father—glad to see you—it's a long journey from India—won't you sit down— *(He works up Right Center.)*

(GINEVRA has returned down Left Center, watching this. Now, AMY returns, very relieved.)

AMY. How silly of us! It was only Nurse with baby. *(She has left the door open, and we see NURSE wheeling the pram towards off Right. AMY closes the door. During the next moments we hear sounds in the room Right which tells us that this is the nursery. Moving to above the table)* Poor nurse! I suppose I had better show her the telegram. *(She pick it up and crosses to the door Right, opens it, and calls)* Nurse! *(GINEVRA is below the Right end of the sofa. COSMO moves to above the chair Left of the table. NURSE enters Right. AMY Right of the table)* Is Molly asleep?

(The NURSE puts her finger to her lips, closes the door softly, moves in a pace, and bows to GINEVRA.)

AMY. *(Handing her the telegram)* Look, Nurse. *(The NURSE looks at AMY, then crosses slowly below the table, reading the telegram. At Center she checks, and bursts into tears. AMY hurries to her Right)* Nurse! Nurse! *(She tries to comfort her, but the NURSE wriggles free.)*

NURSE. They'll be bringing a black woman to nurse her—a yah-yah they call them— *(AMY signals to*

GINEVRA *to go*. GINEVRA *crosses up Right Center and exits*) — I've had her for seventeen months. She was just two months old, the angel, when they sent her to England, and she's been mine ever since. The most of them has one look for their mamas and one look for their nurse, but she knew better than to have both looks for me— (*She bursts into loud sobs and crosses back to the nursery door*) My reign is over—

(*She exits. AMY and COSMO watch her go.*)

COSMO. Do you think Molly *will* chuck Nurse for Mother?

AMY. (*Putting the telegram down on the table*) It is the way of children. (*She crosses Left.*)

COSMO. Shabby little beasts! (*He moves down Left of the chair, to the table, and picks up the telegram.*)

AMY. You mustn't say that, Cosmo. (*She turns, below the sofa*) Still, it's very hard on Nurse. (*She kneels on the sofa, facing Right*) Of course, in a sense, it's hard for all of us—I mean, to be expecting parents in these circumstances. There must be almost the same feeling of strangeness in the house as when it is a baby expected.

COSMO. (*Gloomily*) I suppose it is a bit like that. (*He is struck by the idea of how awful that is, and moves towards her*) Great Scott, Amy! It can't be quite so bad as *that!*

AMY. (*Despondently, taking his hand*) What do we really know about Mother?

COSMO. There are her letters.

AMY. Can one know a person by letters? (*She leans towards him on the sofa*) Does she know you, Cosmo, by your letters to her, saying your motto is "Something attempted, something done to earn a night's repose" and so on?

COSMO. Well, I thought that would please her.

AMY. Perhaps in her letters she says things just to please us.

COSMO. (*Withdrawing; hurt*) This is pretty low of you, damping a fellow when he was trying to make the best of it.

AMY. All I want you to feel is that as brother and sister, we are allies, you know—against the unknown.

COSMO. (*Penitently*) Yes, Amy.

(*AMY makes room, and he sits beside her on sofa.*)

AMY. I want to say, Cosmo, that I'm very sorry I never bowled to you.

COSMO. (*Affectionately*) That's nothing. I know what girls are, Amy—it's all right.

AMY. I have tried to be a sort of mother to you.

COSMO. My socks and things—I know. (*With renewed anxiety*) Amy, do we know anything of them at all?

AMY. We know some cold facts, of course! We know that father is much older than mother.

COSMO. I can't understand why such an old chap should be so keen to kiss me.

AMY. (*In a low voice*) Mother is forty.

COSMO. (*In an even lower voice*) I thought she was almost more than forty.

AMY. Don't be so ungenerous, Cosmo. Of course we must be prepared to see her look older.

COSMO. Why?

AMY. She will be rather yellow, coming from India, you know—they will both be a little yellow.

(*They look at each other, rather forlorn. COSMO sighs; then speaks stoutly.*)

COSMO. We shan't be any the less fond of them for that, Amy.

AMY. No, indeed. (*She puts her hand on his.*)

COSMO. (*Suddenly catching sight of the yellow flowers on the mantelpiece*) Do you think we should have these yellow flowers in the room? They might feel—ch?

AMY. (*Rising and taking down the vases*) How thoughtful of you, Cosmo. I shall remove them at once. (*She crosses to Center, stops, and turns to him*) After all, Cosmo, we seem to know a good deal about them, and we know some other things by heredity. (*She goes up to the door up Right Center.*)

COSMO. Heredity? That's drink, isn't it?

AMY. (*Turning at the door*) No, you boy! It's something in a play. (*She puts the vase on the top of the piano, and crosses down to above the chair Left of the table*) It means that if we know ourselves well, we know our parents also. (*Sitting on the arm of the chair*) From thinking of myself, Cosmo, I know mother. In her youth she was one who did not love easily, but when she loved once it was for aye. A nature very difficult to understand, but profoundly interesting. I can feel her— (*Touching her heart*) —within me, as she was when she walked down the aisle on that strong arm, to honour and obey him henceforth for aye. What cared they that they had to leave their native land? They were together for ever. (*She rises*) And so—

COSMO. (*Kneeling up on the sofa, over the Right arm*) What about father?

AMY. (*Less enthusiastically*) Very nice, unless you mention rupees to him. (*She sits in the chair.*)

COSMO. Rupees?

AMY. You see, the pensions of all Indian officers are paid in rupees, which means that for every two shillings due to them they get only one and fourpence. If you mention rupees to any of them, they flare up like a burning paper.

COSMO. I see. (*He thinks for a moment*) But what would you say he was like by heredity?

AMY. Quiet, unassuming, yet of an intensely proud nature. One who, if he was deceived, would never again face his fellow creatures, but would bow his head before the wind, and die. A strong man.

COSMO. (*Rising; impressed*) Do you mean he takes all that from me?

AMY. — mean that is the sort of man *my* mother would love.

COSMO. (*Gloom returning*) Yes, but he's just as likely to kiss me as ever. (*He moves Left towards the fire.*)

GINEVRA. (*Re-enters up Right Center. Moves down to above the chair Right of the table*) Are you coming, Amy?

AMY. (*Rising*) Yes, I'm coming. (*She crosses to the sofa table for the towel.*)

COSMO. (*Crossing to the table Right Center for his cap*) I think I'll go and walk up and down outside, and have a look at them as they're getting out of the cab. (*He moves up Left Center, checks and eases down nearer AMY*) My plan, you see, is first to kiss mother. Then, I've made up four things to say to father, and it's after I've said them that the awkward time will come. So then I say, "I wonder what's in the evening papers"—and out I slip, and when I come back you've all settled down to ordinary life, same as other people. (*He pauses, looks anxiously at AMY*) That's my plan—

(*AMY looks gravely at him. He glances from her to GINEVRA, hesitates, and exits quickly up Left Center. AMY picks up the hair brush and comb.*)

GINEVRA. How strange boys are! (*Moving up stage*) Have you any "plan," Amy? (*She takes the "trouser leg" from the back of the chair above the table.*)

AMY. (*Moving towards GINEVRA*) Only this, dear—to leap into my mother's arms.

GINEVRA. (*Holding up the "trouser leg"*) What is this my busy bee is making?

AMY. It's a gentleman's leg. You hand-sew them and stretch them over a cylinder, and they are used as umbrella stands. *Art In The Home* says they are all the rage.

GINEVRA. Oh, Amy, *Boudoir Gossip* says they have quite gone out.

AMY. Again! Every art decoration I try goes out before I have time to finish it. (*She takes the trouser leg and puts it down, looking around at her efforts sadly. Then she brightens suddenly*) But my diary, Ginevra—did you like the new page?

GINEVRA. Dearest, that is what I came down to speak about. You forgot to give me the key.

AMY. Ginevra, can you ever forgive me? Let's go up and read it together.

(*They move up Right Center arm in arm, and exit. A pause. Then a cab is heard drawing up outside. A door slam. COSMO rushes in up Left Center. He is about to make an announcement when he finds the room empty. He tiptoes to the door by which he has entered and peeps out. Another door slam off. COSMO closes the door softly, and hastens across to up Right Center, and exits. The COLONEL'S voice is heard in the hall.*)

COLONEL. (*Off*) No, no—put them down there for the present. The heavy things are coming on later. Thank you—

(*The door up Left Center opens, and ALICE enters. She is beautiful, with youthful manners, charm, and sometimes almost childlike impulse, but is never childish. Though she has always been the belle of the station in India, it has not spoiled her.*

She looks around. The eager joy in her face dies as she sees there is no one to welcome her. She moves, a little uncertainly, down towards the fireplace, as FANNY enters and stands Right of the door to admit the COLONEL.

COLONEL GREY is a grizzled veteran some years older than ALICE. He hates fuss, and is pretending, not very successfully, that he is not almost as excited as ALICE. He moves to Center, looking round with something of his wife's disappointment,

and moves to above the table Right Center. FANNY comes down to above and Right of the sofa.)

ALICE. (*Below the sofa*) You are sure they are *all* out?

FANNY. Yes, ma'am.

ALICE. Even—the baby?

FANNY. I—I think so, ma'am.

ALICE. (*Excitedly; crossing to below the table Right Center which she has suddenly espied*) Robert! (*She lifts the flap of the table*) I daresay my Amy painted that table!

FANNY. Yes, ma'am—she did.

ALICE. (*Caressing the handiwork*) Robert! Amy's table!

COLONEL. Yes—but keep cool, memsahib. (*He moves towards the fireplace.*)

(*FANNY notices the COLONEL examining the dressings on the mantel, and moves a little further Center.*)

FANNY. (*To ALICE*) I suppose, ma'am, I'm to take my orders from you, now?

ALICE. (*A trifle timidly*) I suppose so.

FANNY. (*Taking this as a sign that she may be bolder*) Poor Miss! It will be a bit trying for her at first.

(*ALICE is a trifle taken aback. The COLONEL turns, and moves to below the sofa, taking command.*)

COLONEL. Fiddle-de-dee! Bring your mistress a cup of tea, my girl.

FANNY. Yes, sir. (*She moves up Center to the piano, and fetches the tea caddy and the bunch of keys*) Here is the tea caddy, ma'am. I couldn't take the responsibility—but this is the key. (*She holds up one of the keys.*)

ALICE. (*Faltering*) Robert, I daren't break into Amy's caddy. She mightn't like it. I can wait.

COLONEL. (*Firmly*) Rubbish. (*Moving to FANNY*) Give me the key. (*He takes the key, opens the caddy, and pours out a measure of tea into the ladle, which he hands to FANNY*) There! (*FANNY stares at him; in fact, both women regard him with admiration*) That makes me feel that I'm master in my house already. Don't stare at me, girl, as if I was a house-breaker. (*He turns, and moves towards Left Center again.*)

(*FANNY puts the caddy and the keys back on the piano, and exits up Right Center, very subdued. When the door closes, all their attempts to suppress their excitement vanishes. COLONEL turns and holds out his arms boyishly. ALICE rushes to him.*)

ALICE. Robert, it's home! Home! Home! India done—home begun!

(*They embrace.*)

COLONEL. (*Equally delighted*) Home, memsahib! And we've never had a real one before. Thank God I'm able to give it you at last.

ALICE. (*Dancing away up Center towards Right, pointing to the pictures*) Look! Those pictures! (*The COLONEL follows, more leisurely, surveying everything*) I'm sure they are all Amy's work! They're splendid! (*They look at each other with slight misgiving*) Aren't they?

COLONEL. (*Guardedly*) Well—I couldn't have done them. (*He studies the hand-painted curtains*) She seems to have stopped everything in the middle. Still—I couldn't have done them. (*He looks at the shelves, up Right*) I expect this is what they call a cosy corner. (*He turns away to the piano.*)

ALICE. (*Having found a baby's shoe on the round table down Right*) Oh, look! Look! (*She holds it up.*)

COLONEL. (*Turning down Left of the table*) What is it?

ALICE. (*Going to him*) A baby's shoe! My baby! (*She is suddenly appalled by a thought*) Robert! If I had met my baby coming along the street, I shouldn't have known her from other people's babies!

COLONEL. (*Consoling her*) Yes, you would. Don't break down *now*. Just think, Alice, after today you will know your baby anywhere. (*He pats her shoulder and moves Left.*)

ALICE. (*Perched on the Right arm of the chair Center*) Oh, joy, joy, joy! (*Her expression changes suddenly*) O-oh! (*She sits in the chair.*)

COLONEL. (*Turning, below the sofa*) What is it now?

ALICE. Perhaps she won't like me!

COLONEL. Poof! Impossible. (*He half sits on the Right arm of the sofa.*)

ALICE. Perhaps none of them will like me!

COLONEL. (*Taking out his pipe and pouch*) My dear Alice, children always love their mother, whether they see much of her or not. It's an instinct.

ALICE. Who told you that?

COLONEL. (*Loading his pipe*) You goose, it was yourself.

ALICE. (*Tragically*) I've lost faith in it.

COLONEL. Of course, we must give them a little time.

ALICE. (*Sitting erect*) Not another minute! That's not the way people ever love me. They mustn't think me over first, or anything of that sort. If they do, I'm lost! They must love me at once.

COLONEL. (*Smiling, as he lights his pipe*) A good many have done that!

ALICE. (*With burlesque surprise*) You are not implying, Robert, that I ever flirted. (*He gives her a tolerant, quizzical look*) If I ever flirted I always told you about it afterwards, didn't I? (*He nods. ALICE moves towards him*) And I *certainly* never flirted until I was sure you were comfortable.

COLONEL. You always wrapped me up first.

ALICE. (*Wheedling*) They were only boys, Robert—

poor lonely boys! (*He folds his arm, surveying her*)
What are you thinking, Robert?

COLONEL. I was trying to picture you as you will be when you settle down.

ALICE. Not settled down yet, with a great girl of seventeen? (*Crossing back to Center*) And yet it's true—oh, when shall I settle down? (*She sits in the chair Left of the table.*)

COLONEL. I can tell you exactly. In a year from today. (*He moves to her chair and leans over it; seriously*) Alice, when I took you away to that dreary Indian station, I was already a middle-aged bloke. I chuckled over your gaiety, but I couldn't be gay with you. Poor girl, you were like an only child who has to play alone. When for one month in the twelve we went to— (*He hesitates. She looks up at him*) —to where the boys were, it was like turning you loose in a sweet-stuff shop.

ALICE. Oh, Robert, what nonsense you talk!

COLONEL. (*With a wry face*) I didn't always like it, memsahib! (*She nestles to him*) But I knew my witch, and could trust her. And I swore to myself, "I shan't ask her to settle down until I have given her a year in England. A year from today, you harum-scarum. By that time, your daughter will be almost grown-up herself, and it wouldn't do to let her pass you.

ALICE. (*Rising*) Robert, she and I will come of age together! (*Kneeling on the chair*) I promise; or I shall try to keep one day in front of her like the school masters when they are teaching the boys Latin. (*Wheedling*) Dearest, you haven't been disappointed in me on the whole, have you? I haven't paid you for all your dear kindness to me—in rupees, have I?

COLONEL. (*With mock sternness*) No, and I hope you never will— (*He pats her cheek, and is moving away Left when a child's cry is heard in the room Right. They both start, and look at each other. ALICE stands, puts her hand on her heart and, turning, stares at the door Right for some moments.*)

ALICE. It's my Molly!

(*She glances again at the COLONEL, who is staring towards the door. The NURSE enters Right and pauses in the doorway.*)

NURSE. (*After closing the door softly*) Is it—Mrs. Grey?

ALICE. (*Moving slowly to Center*) Yes. Is my—child in there?

(*The COLONEL moves towards ALICE.*)

NURSE. Yes, ma'am.

(*ALICE turns and clutches the COLONEL.*)

COLONEL. Alice, be calm.

ALICE. (*To the NURSE*) May I go in?

NURSE. (*Coldly*) She's sleeping, ma'am, and I have made it a rule to let her wake herself. But I daresay it's a bad rule.

ALICE. I'm sure it's a good rule. (*With her hand on her heart*) I shan't waken her, Nurse.

COLONEL. By Gad, *I* will. It's the least she can do to let herself be awakened. (*He begins to move towards the nursery.*)

ALICE. (*Stopping him*) Don't interfere, Robert.

COLONEL. Sleeping? Why, she cried just now.

NURSE. (*Moving a little*) That's why I came out—to see who was making so much noise.

(*ALICE and the COLONEL look at each other guiltily.*)

NURSE. (*With a hint of contempt*) I'm vexed when she cries. I daresay it's old-fashioned of me. Not being a yah-yah I'm at a disadvantage.

ALICE (*With a show of spirit*) After all, she's *my* child.

COLONEL. (*Urging ALICE towards the nursery door*) Come along, Alice.

ALICE. (*Checking him*) I should prefer to go alone, dear.

COLONEL. All right—but break it to her that I'm kicking my heels outside.

(*ALICE crosses to the door Right and opens it.*)

NURSE. (*On her Left*) You won't touch her, ma'am—she doesn't like to be touched by strangers.

ALICE. (*Turning at the door*) Strangers!

COLONEL. Nurse!

ALICE. It's quite true!

NURSE. She's an angel if you have the right way with her.

ALICE. (*Closing the door and facing the COLONEL*) Robert, if I shouldn't have the right way with her!

COLONEL. *You!*

ALICE. (*With humble anxiety*) Nurse, what sort of a way does she like from strangers?

NURSE. She's not fond of a canoodlin' way.

ALICE. (*Faintly*) Isn't she?

(*She hesitates, then opens the nursery door gently, and exits. The NURSE looks at the COLONEL, as if daring him to discharge her. He appears to be incapable of such drastic action; the NURSE, concealing her triumph, follows ALICE, and closes the nursery door.*)

The COLONEL pockets his pipe, and steals rather guiltily across to the nursery door, opens it an inch, and peeps in, controlling his delight and amusement.

FANNY enters up Right Center with the tea tray. As she moves down to above the table, she observes the COLONEL in his rather undignified pursuit. She is about to announce the arrival of tea when COSMO enters up Left Center. FANNY looks at him, and COSMO looks from her to the COLONEL.

Then he signs to her, takes the tray, gives her his cap, and signals that she should not speak, but leave. She exits.)

COSMO. (*Armed with the tray as a defence against embrace*) Hallo, Father!

COLONEL. (*Gives a start, and turns*) Is it—it's Cosmo!

(*He hurries to COSMO with outstretched arms. COSMO interposes the tray.*)

COSMO. (*Backing away a pace or two, Left Center*) I'm awfully glad to see you—it's a long way from India—won't you sit down?

COLONEL. (*Advancing, trying to dodge the tray*) Put that down, my boy, and let me get a hold of you.

COSMO. (*Ingratiatingly*) Have some tea, Father!

COLONEL. Put it down! (*COSMO puts the tray on the sofa table, and moves down, Right of the sofa, prepared for the worst. The COLONEL takes both his hands*) Let's have a look at you. So this is you.

(*He waggles his head, well pleased. COSMO manages to withdraw his hands and backs down below the Right end of the sofa.*)

COSMO. Has Mother gone to lie down?

COLONEL. Lie down? (*He points towards the nursery*) She's in there.

COSMO. (*Enlightened*) Oh. (*He darts across Right and closes the nursery door quietly.*)

COLONEL. Why did you do that?

COSMO. (*By the door Right*) I don't know. I thought it would be—best. (*He moves to below the Right end of the table*) This is not the way I—planned it, you see.

COLONEL. (*Moving to Center*) Our meeting? So you've been planning it! My dear fellow, I was planning it too. (*COSMO retreats a pace*) And my plan—

COSMO. Yes, I know. Now that's over—our first meeting, I mean—now we settle down.

COLONEL. Not yet. Come here, my boy.

(He takes COSMO by the hand and draws him over to the chair Left of the table, in which he sits. COSMO braces himself to speak plainly.)

COSMO. Look here, Father, of course you see—ways change. I daresay they did it when you were a boy, but it's not done now.

COLONEL. What isn't done, my dear fellow?

COSMO. *(He makes a vague gesture)* Oh—well! And then, taking both hands, and saying "Dear fellow." It's gone out, you know.

COLONEL. *(Releasing COSMO's hands, and chuckling)* I'm uncommon glad you told me, Cosmo. Not having been a father for so long, you see, I'm rather raw at it.

COSMO. *(Relieved)* That's all right. You'll soon get the hang of it.

COLONEL. If you could give me any other tips?

COSMO. Well, there's my beastly name. Of course, you didn't mean any harm when you christened me "Cosmo," but—I always sign myself "C. Grey"—to make the fellows think I'm Charles.

COLONEL. Do they call you that?

COSMO. Lord, no! They call me Grey.

COLONEL. And do you want me to call you Grey?

COSMO. *(Magnanimously)* No, I don't expect that. But I thought before people, you know—you needn't call me anything. If you want to attract my attention you could just say "Hst!"—like that.

COLONEL. Right you are. But you won't make your mother call you "Hst!"

COSMO. *(Sagaciously)* Oh—no—of course women are different.

COLONEL. You'll be fond of her, Cosmo. She had to

pinch and save more than I should have allowed—to be able to send you into the Navy. (*He rises, crosses to the fireplace, and warms his hands*) We're poor people, you know.

COSMO. I've been planning how to be nice to her, but—

COLONEL. Good lad—good lad.

COSMO. (*Coming to Left Center*) You don't have your medals here, Father?

COLONEL. (*Surprised*) No, I don't carry them about. But your mother does, the goose. They're not very grand ones, Cos—h'm! (*He checks himself in time.*)

COSMO. (*Stoutly*) Oh yes, they are. (*An awkward pause. The COLONEL regards COSMO with great affection, and COSMO'S fears return. He shuffles a moment before speaking*) I—wonder what's in the evening paper— I—I think I'll go out and get one—

(*He hastens to the door up Left Center. Before he can go ALICE enters Right, the picture of distress. A baby is heard crying in the nursery. COSMO checks at the door. ALICE does not see him.*)

ALICE. (*Crossing towards Center*) My baby! Robert, that is how I affect her!

COLONEL. (*Crossing to her*) No, no darling! She—she's teething. (*The NURSE enters triumphantly, and stands below and Right of the table. The COLONEL addresses her*) It's her teeth, isn't it, Nurse? (*The NURSE does not reply. Fiercely*) Say it's her teeth, woman!

NURSE. (*Bridling*) She had her teeth long ago.

ALICE. (*Forlornly*) "The better to bite me with."

NURSE. I don't understand it. She is usually the best tempered lamb—as you may see for yourself, sir.

COLONEL. (*Taking a pace towards the nursery then checking*) I decline to see her. I refuse to have anything to do with her till she comes to a more reasonable frame of mind.

(The NURSE exits Right, not without satisfaction.)

ALICE. Go, Robert. Perhaps she—will like you better.

COLONEL. She's a little fool—contemptible child.
(Crossing to the door Right) I'll show her. *(Turning to ALICE)* Alice!

(He points to COSMO and exits Right, slutting the door. COSMO moves down Left Center. ALICE is entranced. COSMO salutes nervously, and crosses to Center. She embraces him.)

ALICE. My son!

COSMO. *(Forgetting all plans)* Mother!

(He is really moved and kisses her warmly. She envelops him in her arms, worshipping him.)

ALICE. Oh, Cosmo! *(She backs a pace, admiring him)*
How splendid you are!

COSMO. *(Soothingly)* That's all right, Mother.

ALICE. Say it again!

COSMO. That's all right.

ALICE. No, the other word.

COSMO. Mother.

ALICE. Again!

COSMO. Mother! Mother— *(She embraces him, half crying. Then after a while he speaks)* Are you better now?

ALICE. *(Backing, holding his hands)* He's my son, and he's in uniform?

COSMO. Yes, I know.

ALICE. Are you glad to see your mother, Cosmo?

COSMO. Rather! *(She hugs him again. He releases himself, takes her by the hands, and draws her to the sofa)* Will you have some tea?

ALICE. No, no, I feel I can do nothing for the rest of my life— *(Hugging him again)* —but hug my glorious boy.

(They BOTH sit on the sofa, she at the Right end and he on her Left.)

COSMO. (*While ALICE is hugging him*) Of course I have my work.

ALICE. (*Releasing him*) His work! Do the officers love you, Cosmo?

COSMO. (*Feeling degraded*) Love me! I should think not!

ALICE. I should like to ask them all to come and stay with us.

COSMO. (*Appalled*) Great Scott, Mother, you can't do things like that.

ALICE. Can't I? Are you very studious, Cosmo?

COSMO. (*Neatly*) My favourite authors are William Shakespeare and William Milton.

ALICE. Oh!

COSMO. (*Wistfully*) They are grand, don't you think?

ALICE. I'm only a woman you see, and I'm afraid they bore me.

COSMO. (*Eagerly*) Do they? (*Sighing with relief*) Me too!

ALICE. (*Gloomily*) But not half as much as I bore my baby.

COSMO. What did you do to her?

ALICE. I couldn't help wanting to hold her in my arms, could I, Cosmo?

COSMO. (*Rising and moving to the fireplace*) No, of course you couldn't. (*He turns*) How did you take hold of her?

ALICE. I suppose in some clumsy way.

COSMO. Not like— (*Making a swooping gesture*)—this, was it?

ALICE. (*Gloomily*) I daresay.

COSMO. You should have done it this way. (*He makes the proper action of taking up a baby.*)

ALICE. (*With beaming humility*) Thank you, Cosmo.

COSMO. If you like, I'll show you with a cushion. (*He crosses to the chair Left of the table, and arranges the*

cushion. ALICE *leans over the Right arm of the sofa, to watch*) You see, this— (*Scooping up the cushion*) — is wrong. (*He puts down the cushion*) But this— (*He picks it up properly*) — is right. Another good way is this— (*He suits the action to the word*) — with their head hanging over your shoulder. (*Crossing to the Right arm of the sofa*) You wouldn't think it was comfortable— (*Putting the cushion on the sofa arm*) — but they like it.

ALICE. (*Rising*) I see, Cosmo. (*She takes the cushion to the Left of the chair by the table, turns and repeats COSMO's last two actions*) First this way—then this way?

COSMO. That's first class.

(ALICE *throws the cushion away on the chair Center, and hugs him.*)

ALICE. You darling boy!

COSMO. (*Struggling to free himself*) I think I hear a boy calling the evening papers.

ALICE. (*Holding his hands*) Don't go. There can be nothing in the evening papers about what my boy thinks of his mother. (*She draws him towards the chair Center, where she sits.*)

COSMO. (*Left of the chair*) Good Lord, no! You haven't seen Amy yet? It isn't fair of Amy. She should have been here to take some of it off me.

ALICE. Cosmo! (*She rises slowly*) You don't mean that I bore you too?

COSMO. (*Seeing that he has hurt her*) I love you, Mother. And I don't think you're so yellow.

ALICE. (*Startled*) Yellow! (*She comes nearer to him*) Cosmo, do you think me plain?

COSMO. No, I don't. I'm not one of those who judge people by their looks. The soul, you know, is what I judge them by.

ALICE. (*Sitting on the Left arm of the chair*) Plain? Me!

COSMO. Of course it's all right for girls to bother about being pretty. (*He laughs, crosses and sits on the Right arm of the sofa*) I can tell you a funny thing about that. We had theatricals at Osborne one night, and we played a thing called "The Royal Boots."

ALICE. (*Delighted*) I played in that too, last year!

COSMO. (*A little incredulously*) You?

ALICE. Yes. Why shouldn't I?

COSMO. But we did it for fun.

ALICE. So did we.

COSMO. (*His views on the universe crumbling*) You still like fun?

ALICE. (*Standing*) Take care, Cosmo!

COSMO. But you're our mother.

ALICE. Mustn't mothers have fun?

COSMO. (*Heavily*) Must they? (*Suddenly enlightened*) I see! You played the dowager.

ALICE. No, I didn't. I played the girl in the Wellington boots!

COSMO. (*Standing; aghast*) Mother, I played the girl in the Wellington boots!

ALICE. (*Startled; then seeing a happy way out*) My son— (*She crosses to him*) This ought to bring us closer together. (*She takes his hand.*)

COSMO. (*Dazed*) But the reason I did it was that we were all boys. Were there no young ladies where you did it, Mother?

ALICE. (*Forgetting herself*) Cosmo!

(*In sudden wrath, she flips his face with her hand.*)

COSMO puts his hand to his cheek and backs against the arm of the sofa. At that moment, the COLONEL enters from the nursery looking very complacent.)

COSMO. Mother!

(*They glare at each other.*)

COLONEL. (*Crossing to Center*) It's all right now, Alice—she took to me at once!

ALICE. (*Startled—turning to him*) Oh, did she!

(*COSMO moves up above the sofa, turns and listens.*)

COLONEL. Gurgled at me—pulled my moustache.

ALICE. I hope you got on with our dear son as well.
(*She moves to below the sofa.*)

COLONEL. Isn't he a fine fellow?

ALICE. I have just been smacking his face. (*She sits at the Right end of the sofa, and weeps.*)

COLONEL. (*Laughing*) What? (*Then he sees it is not a joke, and groans. COSMO is holding himself high and sulking. The COLONEL signs to COSMO*) H'st! I think you had better go and get that evening paper. (*Exit COSMO stiffly Left Center. The COLONEL watches him off, then turns to ALICE*) Smacking his face? But why, Alice?

ALICE. He infuriated me.

COLONEL. (*Left of the chair Center*) He seems such a good boy.

ALICE. No doubt he is. It must be very trying to have me for a mother.

COLONEL. Perhap you were too demonstrative.

ALICE. I daresay. A woman he doesn't know. No wonder I disgusted him.

COLONEL. (*Dismissing the subject*) Pooh! (*Pausing; puzzled*) I can't make it out.

ALICE. (*Abjectly*) It's quite simple. He saw through me at once. So did the baby.

(*Sounds are heard in the hall.*)

COLONEL. (*Turning up towards the door Left Center*) Oh, poof! (*He peeps out, and then comes down Left Center excitedly*) Alice! There's a girl out there!

ALICE. (*Startled*) Amy?

COLONEL. I suppose so.

ALICE. (*Holding out her hand*) Robert—if she doesn't love me I shall die.

COLONEL. (*Going to her*) She will. (*He is a little nervous himself, but pats her hand reassuringly*) Don't be too demonstrative. (*He moves up Left Center.*)

ALICE. I shall try to be cold. (*To herself, as she crosses to below the chair Left of the table*) Oh, Amy—love me!

AMY. (*Enters up Left Center with her hair up, and dressed very correctly. She sees the COLONEL, and rushes to him and puts her arms round him*) Father! I hadn't any idea—

(*They embrace warmly. The COLONEL's chief anxiety is for ALICE. He points to her.*)

COLONEL. Your mother, Amy!

(*AMY rushes down to embrace ALICE, who, however, only takes her hand.*)

ALICE. It is you, Amy! (*COLONEL crosses down Left Center, watching*) How are you, dear? (*Kissing her*) It is a great pleasure to your father and me to see you again.

AMY. (*Dampened by this reception*) Thank you, Mother— (*She glances at the COLONEL, then at ALICE*) Of course, I have been looking forward to this meeting very much also.

ALICE. (*Repressing a shudder*) It is very sweet of you to say so.

(*The COLONEL, feeling that things are not going quite right, moves uncomfortably towards the fireplace.*)

AMY. (*Turning to her father as a refuge*) Would you have known me, Father?

COLONEL. (*Taking her by the shoulders and looking into her eyes*) I wonder! (*To ALICE*) She's not like you, Alice.

ALICE. No. I used to be demonstrative, Amy—

AMY. (*Eagerly; advancing to ALICE*) Were you?

ALICE. (*Hurriedly*) Oh, I grew out of it long ago.

AMY. (*Disappointed but sympathetic*) The wear and tear of life.

ALICE. (*Wincing*) No doubt.

AMY. (*Glancing at the COLONEL*) Have you seen Cosmo?

ALICE. Yes.

AMY. (*Eagerly*) What did you think of him?

ALICE. (*Crossing to Left below the sofa*) He—seemed a nice boy. (*She sits.*)

AMY. (*Hurt*) And baby?

ALICE. Yes—oh yes.

AMY. (*Trying again*) Isn't she fat?

ALICE. Is she?

(AMY is pained. She moves up, above and Right of the chair Left of the table. The NURSE enters Right.)

NURSE. (*Moving to Right of the table*) If you please, sir— (*The COLONEL looks at her enquiringly. Pointedly*) I think the baby wants you again.

(She exits. The COLONEL is flattered, crosses to Right of the sofa but then turns, deferentially, to ALICE.)

COLONEL. What do you think, Alice?

ALICE. (*Rising; annoyed*) By all means go! (*She moves to the fireplace.*)

COLONEL. Won't you come also? Perhaps if I am with you—

ALICE. (*After turning and giving him an annihilating look*) No, I—I had quite a long time with her.

(The COLONEL crosses Right with watch and chain ready to fascinate the baby. He hesitates at the door, then exits.)

AMY. You can't have been very long with baby, Mother.

ALICE. Quite long enough.

AMY. (*Thinking her hard-hearted*) Oh! (*She picks up the cushion on the chair Left of the table, and arranges it for ALICE*) You will take some tea, won't you?

ALICE. Thank you, dear. (*She crosses to Left of the table, and sits.*)

AMY. (*Crosses to the sofa table, fetches the tea tray, takes it to the table Right Center and sits in the chair above it. A pause. Then AMY breaks the silence formally*) Both milk and sugar?

ALICE. No sugar.

(*AMY pours the tea in silence, hands ALICE her cup, and then pours her own before attempting more conversation.*)

AMY. I hope you will like the house, Mother.

ALICE. I'm sure you have chosen wisely. I see you are artistic.

AMY. The decoration isn't finished. I haven't quite decided what this room is to be like yet.

ALICE. One never can tell.

(*There is another pause. They drink again.*)

AMY. Did you notice there was a circular carriage drive to the house?

ALICE. No, I didn't notice.

AMY. That would be because the cab filled it, but you can see it if you are walking.

ALICE. I shall look out for it. (*She puts her cup on the tray and extends her hand, pained*) Amy, have you nothing more important to say to me?

AMY. You mean—the keys? (*She rises—crosses up to the piano for the books and keys, then back to ALICE Left of the table*) Here they are—all with labels on them. And here are the tradesman's books. (*Regarding the books tenderly*) They are all paid up to Wednesday. (*She hands them to ALICE.*)

ALICE. (*Crushed; throwing the books on the table*)
Is there nothing else?

AMY. Perhaps you have noticed that my hair is up?

ALICE. It so took me aback, Amy, when you came into the room. How long have you had it up?

AMY. (*Awkwardly*) Not very long. I—I only began today.

ALICE. (*Imploringly*) Dear! Put it down again. You are not grown up—only seventeen.

AMY. (*Almost sternly*) I feel I am a woman now.

ALICE. A woman—you? (*Pathetically*) Am I never to know my daughter as a girl?

AMY. You were married before you were eighteen.

ALICE. Ah, but I had no mother. And even at that age I knew the world.

AMY. Oh, Mother, not so well as I know it.

ALICE. (*Sharply*) What can you know of the world?

AMY. (*Patting her mother's hand*) More, I hope, Mother, than you will ever know.

ALICE. (*Rising—alarmed*) My child! (*Seizing her hands*) Amy, tell me what you know.

AMY. Don't ask me, please. I have sworn not to talk of it. (*She withdraws her hands.*)

ALICE. Sworn? To whom?

AMY. To another.

ALICE. (*Pouncing on her hand to see if she is wearing engagement ring*) Tell me! Amy, who is that other?

AMY. It is our secret.

ALICE. Amy—I beg you!

AMY. Dear Mother, I am so sorry I must decline. (*She turns away to below the Right end of the sofa.*)

ALICE. (*Appalled*) You defy me? (*Taking hold of her by the shoulders and turning her round*) Amy, you drive me frantic. If you don't tell me at once I shall insist on your father— (*Vehemently*) Oh you—

(*She is shaking AMY when the COLONEL re-enters Right.*)

COLONEL. (*Aghast*) Good Heavens, Alice! Again? Amy, what does this mean? (*He crosses to above the table Right Center.*)

(*ALICE, with a despairing gesture, crosses down Left to the fireplace.*)

AMY. (*Insulted and in tears; with a pace or two towards the COLONEL*) It means, Father, that I love you very much! (*She turns, and rushes out up Left Center.*)

COLONEL. (*Gravely; moving down to between the table and the sofa*) Won't you explain, Alice?

ALICE. (*Turning, and crossing to him*) Robert, I am in terror about Amy.

COLONEL. (*Disturbed*) Why?

ALICE. Don't ask me, dear—not now—not till I have spoken to her again— (*Clinging to him*) Robert—there can't be anything in it!

COLONEL. (*Stoutly*) If you mean anything wrong about our girl, there isn't, memsahib. What great innocent eyes she has.

ALICE. (*Eagerly*) Yes, yes, hasn't she, Robert?

COLONEL. (*Patting her shoulder*) I could see through them down into her soul. All's well with Amy, dear.

ALICE. Of course it is. It was silly of me. (*Crossing him to below the chair Left of the table*) My Amy!

COLONEL. And mine. (*He moves a little down Left Center.*)

ALICE. (*Turning to look at him*) But I can't see into her soul. She seems to me hard to understand. (*Moving towards him*) I begin to feel, Robert, that I should have come back to my children long ago—or I shouldn't have come back at all. (*She embraces him, tearfully.*)

COLONEL. Pooh! Nonsense! (*He comforts her, leading her down Left below the sofa.*)

(*FANNY enters up Left Center and ushers in STEVE*

ROLLO. *He is a round-faced young man, with a frank, open, and almost boyish manner.*)

FANNY. Mr. Rollo. *(She exits.)*

(STEVE moves down, puts his hat and gloves on the sofa table, and eases Right of the sofa as the COLONEL goes to meet him. ALICE, turning to the fireplace, wipes her eyes before facing him.)

COLONEL. *(Taking STEVE's hands)* Steve, my boy, this is good of you.

STEVE. You're looking fit, Colonel. Welcome to England! *(He crosses down below the COLONEL to ALICE, and takes her hands. The COLONEL moves a little towards Center, his eyes on the nursery door)* Alice, I daresay you wish me to Jericho, but it's six months since I saw you, and I couldn't wait till tomorrow.

ALICE. I *am* pleased. I believe there's someone in this house glad to see me at last, and you may kiss me for that, Steve. *(She gives him her cheek.)*

STEVE. *(Having found her cheek wet; turning to the COLONEL)* But you are not telling me they don't adore her?

COLONEL. I can't understand it. *(He moves Center to the chair.)*

STEVE. *(Moving to Right of the sofa)* But by all the little gods of India, you know, everyone has always adored Alice.

ALICE. That's why I take it so ill, Steve. *(She moves to below the Right end of the sofa and sits.)*

STEVE. *(Between the sofa and the chair Left of the table)* Can I do anything? See here, if the house is upside down, and you would like to get rid of the Colonel for an hour or two, suppose he dines with me tonight? I'm dying to hear all the news of the Punjaub since I left.

COLONEL. *(With one eye on the nursery door)* No, Steve, I—the fact is—I have an engagement.

ALICE. (*Having noticed his glance*) He means he can't leave the baby.

STEVE. It has taken to *him*?

COLONEL. Enormously.

ALICE. (*Whimpering*) They *all* have. He has stolen them from me. He has taken up his permanent residence in the nursery.

COLONEL. Pooh! Fiddle-de-dee! (*Taking out his handkerchief, and making a "doll" for the baby's benefit*) I shall probably come round tonight to see you after dinner, Steve, and bring memsahib with me. In the meantime—

ALICE. In the meantime, I want to have a word with Steve alone, Robert.

COLONEL. Very good. (*He steals towards the nursery door, checks, and turns*) Then I shall pop in here again. How is the tea business, Steve? Glad you left India? (*These are the formal duties of a host; he is still itching to get to the nursery.*)

(*STEVE is amused. ALICE turns her head away coldly.*)

STEVE. I don't have half the salary I had in India, but my health is better. How are rupees?

COLONEL. Stop it! Don't ever mention rupees to me. (*He waggles the "doll"*) Alice, I wish it was you they loved. (*He moves Right.*)

ALICE. (*With withering scorn*) Oh, go back to your baby! (*The COLONEL crosses and exits Right. ALICE is momentarily upset. She recovers, and turns to STEVE, anxiously*) Steve— (*She crosses him, thoughtfully, to Right of the sofa, and turns*) —tell me, candidly, what you think of my girl.

STEVE. (*Surprised; moving towards her*) But I've never set eyes on her.

ALICE. Oh, I was hoping you knew her well. She goes often to the Deans and the Rawlings—all our old Indian friends.

STEVE. So do I, but she has never happened to be there. They often speak of her, though.

ALICE. What do they say?

STEVE. They are enthusiastic—an ideal, sweet girl.

ALICE. (*Relieved*) I'm so glad. Now you can go, Steve. (*She smiles, and gives him her hand.*)

STEVE. (*Taking her hand*) It's funny to think of the belle of the Punjab as a mother of a big girl.

ALICE. Don't, or I shall begin to think it's absurd myself. (*She withdraws her hand.*)

STEVE. Surely the boy felt the spell. (*ALICE shakes her head*) But the boys always did.

ALICE. (*Wryly*) They were older boys.

STEVE. I believe I was the only one you never flirted with.

ALICE. (*Smiling*) No one could flirt with you, Steve. (*She crosses to below the chair Left of the table.*)

STEVE. (*Innocently*) I wonder why?

ALICE. (*Looking at him; smiling*) Perhaps because you were always such a good boy.

STEVE. (*Wincing*) I don't know. (*He moves up Right of the sofa table, and turns; with simple candor*) Sometimes, when I saw you flirting, I wanted to do it too—but I could never think of how to begin. (*He sighs*) I feel sure there's something pleasant about it.

ALICE. (*Going up to him*) You're a dear, darling donkey, Steve, but I'm glad you came. It has made the place seem more like home. (*She eases away a pace, looking Right*) All those years I was looking forward to home—(*Turning to him*)—and now I feel that perhaps it is in the place I have left behind me. (*A gurgle of laughter off Right. She glances Right and then turns again to STEVE*) Isn't it horrid of Robert to get on with them so well? (*AMY and GINEVRA open the door Right Center. They pause and listen, hidden from the OTHERS by the door which they hold wide open*) Steve, say Robert's a brute.

STEVE. (*Humorously, picking up his hat and gloves*) Of course he is—selfish beast!

(The GIRLS, horrified, look at each other.)

ALICE. There's another kiss to you for saying so.
(She offers her cheek. He kisses it.)

(The GIRLS are again horrified.)

STEVE. *(Going up to the sofa table)* And you'll come to me after dinner tonight? *(He picks up his hat and gloves.)*

ALICE. I mayn't be able to get away.

STEVE. *(Taking out a card and dropping it on the sofa table)* Here, I'll leave my address. It's quite near. *(Taking her hand)* Do manage somehow.

ALICE. It will depend on whether my silly husband wants to stay with his wretch of a baby. *(They go up Left Center to the door, arm in arm)* I'll see you to the door. Steve—you're much nicer than Robert.

(They exeunt. The GIRLS come further into the room.)

AMY. *(Turning at Center to GINEVRA)* He kissed her!

GINEVRA *(On her Right)* He called her Alice.

AMY. *(Moving down slowly to below the chair Left of the table)* She is going to his house tonight. A *rendez-vous*.

GINEVRA. *(Moving Left to the sofa table)* They will be chambers, Amy; they are always chambers. And *after* dinner, he said—so he's stingy, too. *(She picks up the visiting card)* Here is his name. *(AMY crosses to her and looks at the card too)* "Mr. Stephen Rollo."

AMY. I have heard of him. They said he was a nice man.

GINEVRA. The address is Kensington, West. That's the new name for West Kensington.

AMY. *(Crossing and leaning on chair Left of the table)* My poor father! It would kill him!

GINEVRA. (*Moving down on AMY's Left*) He must never know.

AMY. (*Turning to her*) Ginevra, what's to be done?

GINEVRA. Thank Heaven we know exactly what to do. It rests with you to save her.

AMY. (*Retreating a pace*) You mean I must go—to his rooms?

GINEVRA. (*Firmly*) Yes.

AMY. Evening dress?

GINEVRA. It is always evening dress. And don't be afraid of his man, dear—they always have a man.

AMY. Oh, Ginevra! (*She crosses, agitated, to below the sofa.*)

GINEVRA. First try fascination—you remember how they fling back their cloak—like this, dear. (*She flings back her jacket in illustration*) If that fails—threaten him—you *must* get back the letters, at any cost. There are always letters.

AMY. (*Easing towards the fireplace*) If father should suspect and follow! They usually do.

GINEVRA. Then you must sacrifice yourself for her. Does my dearest falter?

AMY. (*Turning; firmly*) I will do my duty. (*She takes both GINEVRA's hands in hers*) Oh, Ginevra! What things there will be to put in my diary tonight—

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE: STEVE ROLLO's rooms. *The same evening.*

It is a fairly comfortable if slightly untidy room. Some of the furniture is STEVE's, the remainder being his landlady's property.

There is a door at the back, Right Center, leading to the landing and the stairs. Another door, also at the back, at Left Center to his bedroom. The window is at Left, the fireplace at Right. Near the fire is a sofa, and above it a small table. At Left, near the window, is a small 3-flap dining table fully extended at the moment. A chair is above it, and another at the Right end. At the back, slightly Left of Center, is a deep cupboard in a recess; or it may be a pantry built into the wall. Between this and the Right Center door is a small sideboard. In the upper Left corner of the room is a grandfather clock. There is a small easy chair down Right below the fireplace. Between the sofa and the Right wall is a small table on which are a box of cigars, matches, and an ashtray. Down Left, below the window, is an occasional table, and on the wall above it is a framed photograph of a school cricket team. A book case in the Right wall, upstage, and two or three small chairs, complete the furniture. The fire is burning; the curtains are drawn. The room is lit by a central gas chandelier of three globes.

When the Curtain rises, STEVE is sitting above the table, on which are the remains of dinner. He wears a lounge suit. Having finished his meal, he is reading a book which is propped against the entrée dish.

RICHARDSON, a quaint little servant, about fifteen, enters up Right with a large tray.

RICHARDSON. (*Crossing to Right of STEVE*) Are you finished, sir?

STEVE. Yes. (*There is a sly suggestion in his tone.*)

RICHARDSON. (*With a hopeful significance*) Then—am I to clear?

STEVE. (*Glancing at her teasingly, and smiling*) No. (*He rises, and strolls to the fireplace with his book.*)

(RICHARDSON giggles with rapturous anticipation.)

STEVE. (*Turning over a page*) Sit down.

RICHARDSON. Again?

STEVE. Sit down, and clear the enemy out of that dish. (RICHARDSON sits, above the table, in a state of ecstasy. She now begins to ape the lady delightfully. STEVE has thrown his book on the sofa, and now crosses to the cupboard upstage, bringing a plate down to the table. He plays the part of the butler with great deference) Dinner is served, madam. (*He sets the plate, knife, and fork.*)

RICHARDSON. (*Perfectly in the character*) I don't mind if I does have a snack. (*She is about to start when she pauses, nervously*) If Missis was to catch me—!

STEVE. You tuck in, and I'll watch. (*He goes up Right Center, opens the door, and peers along the landing. This is all part of their favourite game.*)

RICHARDSON. (*Transferring the remaining chop to her plate*) She's downstairs, with her arms folded, hoping for this chop herself. (*She attacks the chop with horrid relish. STEVE returns, closes the door, and moves down Center*) What makes you so good to me, sir?

STEVE. (*Casually*) A gentleman is always good to a lady.

RICHARDSON. A lady! Go on!

STEVE. (*Moving to her Left*) And when I found that at dinner time you were subject to growing pains, I remembered my own youth. (*Serving her*) Potatoes, madam?

RICHARDSON. (*Neatly*) If quite convenient. (*She helps herself.*)

STEVE. (*Watches her a moment with a kindly eye. Then strolls back towards the fire, checking at Center*) Can I smoke, Richardson?

RICHARDSON. Of course you can smoke. I've often seen you smoking.

STEVE. But have I your permission?

RICHARDSON. (*Between giggles and severity*) You're at your tricks again!

STEVE. (*Sternly*) Have you forgotten already how I told you a true lady would answer?

RICHARDSON. It makes me that shy. (*With assumed dignity*) Do smoke, Mr. Rollo. I likes the smell of it.

STEVE. (*Bowing, taking out his pipe and pouch and moving towards the fire*) Smoking is a great companion to a lonely devil like myself.

RICHARDSON. Yes, sir. (*Then, wistfully*) Would you say 'devil' to a real lady, sir? (*STEVE is confused. He is about to frame a reply when a bell is heard tinkling. RICHARDSON rises*) That'll be the friends you're expecting.

STEVE. Perhaps— Have you finished, Richardson?

RICHARDSON. Thereabouts. (*She glances longingly at the remains of the chop, then at STEVE*) Would a real lady lick the bone—in company, I mean?

STEVE. (*Judiciously considering*) I—hardly think so.

RICHARDSON. (*Bravely*) Then I'm finished.

STEVE. (*Crossing up Left*) Say I'll be back in a jiffy—I need a brush. (*He exits.*)

(*RICHARDSON is tempted to "lick the bone," and is about to yield when there is a knock at the door up Right Center, and then AMY enters. She is in an evening dress, and over it is a pretty cloak. RICHARDSON puts the bone down guiltily, and moves from the table, her hands behind her back like a naughty school-girl. AMY is also plainly nervous, but covers*

this by a sudden frown. She moves down Right Center.)

AMY. Is this Mr. Rollo's room? The woman told me to knock at the first door.

RICHARDSON. Yes, ma'am. He'll be here in a minute, ma'am. He's expecting you, ma'am. *(She goes to the sideboard for the tray.)*

AMY. We shall see. *(Looking around)* Where's his man?

RICHARDSON. *(Moving down Left of AMY, with the tray)* What man?

AMY. His man. They always have a man.

RICHARDSON. *(Looking at her oddly)* He's a man himself. *(She takes the tray to the table.)*

AMY. Who waits on him?

RICHARDSON. *(Packing the dinner things on the tray)* Me.

AMY. No man! Very strange! *(She moves to below the sofa, and turns to watch RICHARDSON.)*

RICHARDSON. I'll just clear away, ma'am. *(Having packed the tray, she starts to carry it towards the sideboard.)*

AMY. *(With growing excitement)* Stop! *(RICHARDSON checks at Center, staring at AMY, who points accusingly at the tray)* Two persons have been dining here! *(RICHARDSON turns a little, trying to prevent AMY from examining the tray)* Why do you look so scared? Was the other a gentleman? *(RICHARDSON retreats a pace, terrified)* It was not! It can't have been she! I know it wasn't she! Why are you trying to hide that plate? Was it a lady? Girl, tell me! Was it a lady?

RICHARDSON. *(Trembling)* He—he calls her a lady.

AMY. But you know better! *(She turns and moves below the sofa.)*

RICHARDSON. *(Miserably)* Of course I know she ain't a real lady. *(She puts the tray on the sideboard and returns to Center.)*

AMY. Another woman—and not even a lady. *(Turn-*

ing to face RICHARDSON) Tell me, is this the first time she has dined here?

RICHARDSON. (*Regarding AMY piteously*) No, ma'am—I meant no harm, ma'am.

AMY. I am not blaming you. Can you remember how often she has dined here?

RICHARDSON. Well can I remember. Three times a week.

AMY. Three times in one week! Oh, monstrous!

RICHARDSON. (*Moving away to the table, weeping penitently*) Yes ma'am, I sees it is now. (*She removes and folds up the tablecloth.*)

AMY. (*Suddenly; crossing towards RICHARDSON*) What is she like?

RICHARDSON. (*Simpering*) She's a pretty thing. Especially in her ostrich feather.

AMY. Oh, that sort of person. (*She moves away to Left of the sofa.*)

RICHARDSON. (*Stoutly*) Yes, that sort. (*She puts down the Left flap of the table.*)

AMY. (*Ponders for a moment, then turns sharply*) Do you think she's—an adventuress?

RICHARDSON. (*Moving above the table to Right of it*) What's that?

AMY. (*In explanation*) Does she smoke cigarettes?

RICHARDSON. (*Sharply*) No, she don't. (*She puts down the Right flap of the table, and sets the chair close to it, facing down-stage. She then takes the tablecloth up to the cupboard.*)

AMY. (*Puzzled; half to herself*) Not an adventuress! (*She draws again on her theatrical experience*) Can she be secretly married to him? A wife of the past turned up to blackmail him? That's very common.

RICHARDSON. (*Returning to above the table*) Oh, ma'am—you're terrifying me!

AMY. Oh, you! You can go. (*She moves towards the fire. RICHARDSON crosses up towards the sideboard for the tray, but AMY turns, and checks her as she*

reaches Center) Stop! How long had she gone before I came?

RICHARDSON. (*Faltering*) She—she—her that you've been talking about— (*She stops, unable to explain.*)

AMY. (*Advancing to Right Center, her eyes on RICHARDSON*) Come—I must know. (*There is no reply. AMY becomes insistent*) Has she gone? (*Looking around the room*) Is she here still?

RICHARDSON. (*Whimpering*) It was just a chop. What makes you so grudging about a chop?

AMY. I don't care what they ate. Has she gone?

RICHARDSON. (*After a glance over her left shoulder at the door up Left Center*) Oh, ma'am—

(She hastens up Right, grabs the tray, and exits. The drawn curtains attract AMY's eagle eye. She crosses Left, throws them back, but there is no one there. Astonished, she turns, sees the cupboard, and crosses to it.)

AMY. (*As she goes up*) Ah! (*She flings open the cupboard boldly*) Come out! (*No adventuress or blackmailing wife emerges. AMY peeps inside, withdraws, closes the cupboard door, and moves down, puzzled and thoughtful, to the Left end of the sofa.*)

STEVE. (*Enters up Left Center, cheerily, speaking as he closes the door*) I'm awfully glad, Alice, that you—

(He checks at Center, astounded. AMY has turned and faces him with boldness she certainly does not feel. His outstretched arms fall.)

AMY. Sir! (*Her tone is withering.*)

STEVE. I beg your pardon—I thought that—the fact is, I was expecting— (*AMY's stony stare does not help him*) —my name is Rollo—you are not calling on me, are you? (*AMY throws back her cloak dramatically, and waits for the effect, which is most disappointing*) I still think there must be some mistake.

AMY. (*Relentlessly*) There is *no* mistake. (*She removes her gloves.*)

STEVE. Then is there anything I can do for you—?

AMY. (*Eagerly*) You can do so much!

STEVE. (*Indicating the sofa*) Then perhaps if you will be seated. (*Strolling to the fire*) By the way, you haven't told me your name. (*He turns to face her.*)

(AMY inclines her head—she hopes graciously—and, crossing to the sofa, sits.)

AMY. (*Nervously*) If you please, do you mind my not telling it?

STEVE. Oh, very well. (*He begins to wonder if this young woman is as innocent as he first thought her to be*) Well, your business, please?

AMY. (*Puzzled*) Why are you not in evening dress?

STEVE. (*Taken aback*) Does that matter?

AMY. (*Doubtfully*) I don't suppose so.

STEVE. (*Still suspicious of her*) Your business, if you will be so good?

AMY. (*Rising; looking at him squarely*) Stephen Rollo, the game is up!

STEVE. (*Recoiling—as AMY imagines, guiltily*) What on earth—

AMY. A chance discovery has betrayed your secret to me.

STEVE. (*Gasping*) My secret? What is it?

AMY. It is this; that woman is your wife.

STEVE. What woman?

AMY. The woman who dined with you here this evening.

(A pause. Then STEVE, stroking his chin thoughtfully, crosses slowly to Center. He checks and turns to face her, puzzled.)

STEVE. You *look* a nice girl! Whom can you be taking me for?

AMY. (*Turning to him*) This is idle. All these years

you have kept the marriage a secret, for she's a horrid sort of woman, and now she has come back to blackmail you. I see it all. (*He retreats up Left Center fearing she is off her head. AMY approaches to Center*) Mr. Rollo, I shall keep your secret on one condition only—that you return me the letters.

STEVE. (*Moving to above and Right of the table*) The letters?

AMY. (*At Center. Slightly above him*) Yes.

STEVE. (*Facing her*) Look here, honestly, I don't know what you are talking about. You know, I could be angry with you, but I feel sure you are sincere.

AMY. Indeed I am.

STEVE. Well then, I assure you on my word of honor that no lady was dining with me this evening, and that I have no wife.

(*A slight pause.*)

AMY. (*Crestfallen*) No wife! You are sure? Oh, think!

STEVE. I swear it.

AMY. (*Crossing to Left of the sofa, tearfully*) I'm very sorry. (*She turns away from him, crying. Her glove falls from her hand unnoticed by either of them.*)

STEVE. (*Moving to Center slightly above her*) Sorry I have no wife? (*She nods and weeps, not looking at him*) Don't cry. (*He is nice to her*) How could my having a wife be a boon to you?

AMY. (*Half turning, stifling her sobs*) It would have put you in the hollow of my hands. (*She extends her Left hand.*)

STEVE. (*Not knowing what to make of it*) And they are nice hands too.

AMY. (*Is betrayed into a smile. Then she pulls herself up. Reproachfully*) I suppose that is how you got round her.

STEVE. (*Losing patience a little*) Haven't I told you she doesn't exist?

AMY. I don't mean *her*—I mean *her*—

STEVE. (*Deciding that she is a little crazy*) Come now—that's all settled—you'll let me get you a cab, won't you? (*She shakes her head*) I promise not to listen to the address—and when you wake up tomorrow—you will see things differently. (*He moves towards her, speaking in a fatherly way.*)

AMY. (*Facing him; scornfully*) You are very clever—but I don't leave this house without the letters. (*She crosses to the fireplace.*)

STEVE. (*Groaning as he moves to Center and turns*) Are they your letters?

AMY. (*Moving to Right Center*) How dare you? They are the letters written to you, and you well know, by—

STEVE. (*Eagerly*) Yes?

AMY. By a certain young lady. Spare me the pain of having to mention her name.

STEVE. (*Sulkily*) Oh, all right. (*He moves to Left Center and turns.*)

AMY. She is to pass out of your life tonight. Tomorrow, you go abroad for a long time.

STEVE. (*With excusable warmth*) Oh, do I! *Where* am I going?

AMY. We thought—

STEVE. (*Quickly*) We?

AMY. (*With a pace to Center*) A friend and I who have been talking it over. We thought of Africa—to shoot big game.

(*A pause. STEVE half sits on the Right end of the table.*)

STEVE. You must be very fond of this lady.

AMY. I would die for her.

STEVE. After all, am I so dreadful? Why shouldn't she love me?

AMY. A married woman!

STEVE. (*Standing erect; a little gratified*) Married?

AMY. (*With dignity*) Sir, how can you—she is my mother. (*She lowers her head.*)

STEVE. (*At first is too amazed to speak—gradually he becomes elated. His smile growing*) Your mother? Fond of me!

AMY. How dare you look pleased?

STEVE. I'm not—I didn't mean to. I say, I wish you would tell me who you are.

AMY. (*Scornfully*) As if you didn't know!

STEVE. (*In a dream*) Fond of me—I can't believe it. (*Wistfully*) How could she be?

AMY. It was all your fault. You made her love you.

STEVE. (*Still elated*) Do you think I am that kind of man?

AMY. (*With great appeal*) Oh, sir, let her go— (*She kneels to him*) You are strong—she is weak. Think of her poor husband, and give me back the letters—

STEVE. On my word of honour—

(*RICHARDSON enters Right Center. AMY, startled, rises and moves to Left of the sofa. STEVE is annoyed by the interruption.*)

STEVE. (*To RICHARDSON*) What is it?

RICHARDSON. (*Staggered by the situation*) There's a gentleman downstairs, sir, wanting to see you.

(*AMY gives a start. STEVE looks at her, sharply.*)

AMY. (*Moving to the fireplace*) He mustn't find me here. My reputation!

STEVE. (*To AMY*) I can guess who it is. I can't turn him away. Let me think— (*He crosses up Right Center, and turns there*) I'll keep him at the door for a moment. Richardson, take this lady to the upper landing until I have brought him in—then show her out.

RICHARDSON. (*Excitedly*) Yes, sir.

AMY. (*Moving to below the Left end of the sofa*) The letters?

STEVE. Write to me—write to me. I must know more of this. (*He exits hurriedly.*)

RICHARDSON. (*Crossing to the door*) Come quick, ma'am.

AMY. (*With sudden suspicions; crossing to Center*) You are not deceiving me? (*She turns to face RICHARDSON*) You are sure it isn't a lady?

RICHARDSON. Yes, ma'am—he said his name was Colonel Grey.

AMY. (*Appalled; backing to Left Center*) Oh!! Can he suspect?

RICHARDSON. (*Perturbed*) About the chop?

AMY. If she should come while he is here—oh!

RICHARDSON. (*Opening the door*) Come away, ma'am. (*As AMY hesitates*) What is it?

AMY. I can't go away. I'm not going. (*She is reminded of the cupboard, darts up stage, and goes into it, closing the door.*)

RICHARDSON. (*Crossing to the cupboard*) You can't go hiding in there, lady. (*Tugging at the door*) I promised to put you on the upper landing. (*Opening the door*) Come out of that!

AMY. (*Peeping out*) Let go the door. I came here expecting to hide. (*She closes the door.*)

(RICHARDSON stands at Center, distressed. The COLONEL'S voice is heard on the landing. A moment later he enters, followed by STEVE.)

COLONEL. (*As he enters*) Ah! You seem pretty comfortable in here. (*He crosses down Left Center.*)

STEVE. I'm all right. (*He sees RICHARDSON, who is trying to attract his attention*) What is it?

RICHARDSON. Would you speak with me a minute, sir?

STEVE. (*Pointedly*) Go away. You have some work to do on the stair. Go and do it. (*He crosses her, towards the COLONEL*) I'm sorry, Colonel, that you didn't bring Alice with you.

COLONEL. She's coming on later. (*He puts his coat on the chair above the table, and his hat on the table.*)

STEVE. Good. (*He crosses Right Center, waving RICHARDSON away.*)

(*RICHARDSON stands in anguish, glancing from the cupboard to STEVE and back.*)

COLONEL. (*Crossing to the fireplace*) I have come from Pall Mall. Took a sudden notion to look in at the club, so I had a chop there.

RICHARDSON. (*Hovering in the background*) A chop!

(*She exits Right Center, after a worried glance at the cupboard. The COLONEL sits at the Left end of the sofa.*)

STEVE. (*Crossing to the fireplace*) And Alice is coming on from home?

COLONEL. Yes, that's it. Steve, home's the best club in the world. Such jolly fellows all the members.

STEVE. (*Taking up the poker*) You are not beginning about your confounded baby again, are you? (*He turns to the COLONEL, poker in hand.*)

COLONEL. If you don't mind—

STEVE. (*Wagging the poker*) I do mind.

COLONEL. But if you feel you can't stand it—

STEVE. (*Turning, and poking the fire*) You're my guest, so go ahead.

COLONEL. She fell asleep, Steve, holding my finger.

STEVE. Poor old chap! (*He puts down the poker, and stands with his back to the fire.*)

COLONEL. I've been through a good deal in my time, my boy, but that's the biggest thing I've ever done.

STEVE. (*Taking the cigar box from the table Right of the sofa*) Have a cigar.

(*AMY peeps out of the cupboard.*)

COLONEL. Brute! Thanks. *(He takes a cigar, and lights it. AMY retreats into the cupboard. STEVE turns down Right, smiling as he reflects on his previous visitor, and stands with his back to the fire. The COLONEL notes his elation with amusement)* Thinking of the ladies, Steve?

STEVE. *(Blandly)* To tell the truth, I was thinking of one.

COLONEL. She seems to be a nice girl.

STEVE. She's not exactly a girl.

COLONEL. *(Twinkling)* Very fond of you, Steve?

STEVE. I have the best of reasons for knowing that she is. *(The cupboard door, just ajar, moves a little. Crossing to Left of the sofa, turning, and slapping the COLONEL on the back)* On my soul, Colonel, I think it's the most romantic affair I ever heard of. I've waited long for a romance to come into my life, but by Jove, it's come at last. *(He returns complacently to the fire.)*

(During this speech, AMY has peeped out again. She now disappears, closing the cupboard door.)

COLONEL. Congratulations. Does her family like it?

STEVE. *(Cheerily)* No—they're furious.

COLONEL. But why?

STEVE. *(Judiciously)* A woman's secret, Colonel.

COLONEL. Ah, the plot thickens. Do I know her?

STEVE. Not you. *(He sits down Right.)*

COLONEL. I musn't ask her name?

STEVE. *(With presence of mind)* I have a very good reason for not telling you her name.

COLONEL. So? And she's not exactly young. Older than you yourself?

STEVE. She's of the age when a woman knows her own mind—which makes the whole affair extraordinarily flattering.

COLONEL. Oh!

(AMY, furious, shuts herself into the cupboard. In

doing so the corner of her dress is left showing outside the door.)

STEVE. Colonel, you needn't quiz me, for her circumstances are such that her regard for me puts her in a dangerous position, and I would go to the stake rather than give her away.

COLONEL. Quite so. *(He bends low and peers closely at the hearth rug.)*

STEVE. What are you doing?

COLONEL. *(Going on his knees, to Left of the sofa)* Trying to find out whether she comes here.

STEVE. How can you find that out by crawling about my carpet?

COLONEL. I'm looking for hairpins. *(Triumphantly—holding up AMY'S glove)* And I've found one!

(The door bell is heard. They BOTH listen. The front door slams.)

STEVE. *(Rising)* There's someone coming up.

COLONEL. *(Rising)* Perhaps it's Alice. Catch, you scoundrel!

(He throws the glove to STEVE, who catches it, and crosses Left Center, not knowing what to do with it. He is by the chair Right of the table when ALICE is shown in by RICHARDSON. STEVE turns, dropping the glove almost unconsciously on the chair, and going up to meet her, as she moves to Center.)

ALICE. Well, I've come, Steve.

STEVE. *(Helping her off with her cloak)* I'm very glad. *(RICHARDSON exits after a glance at the cupboard)* How did you leave them at home? *(He indicates the chair down Right and takes her cloak to the table, Left.)*

ALICE. *(Crossing down Right)* All hating me. *(She sits, in gloom.)*

STEVE. (*Crossing Left of the sofa*) The Colonel says Home is the best club in the world.

ALICE. I'm not a member. I've been black-balled by my own baby. Robert, I dined in state with Cosmo, and he was so sulky that he ate his fish without salt rather than ask me to pass it. (*She removes the wrap from her head. The COLONEL takes the wrap, and puts it on the sofa table.*)

COLONEL. (*Sitting on the sofa*) Where was Amy?

ALICE. Amy said she had a headache, and went to bed. I knocked at her door before I came out, but she wouldn't answer.

COLONEL. Why didn't you go in?

ALICE. I did think of it, but she had locked the door. (*Gloomily*) Robert, can there be anything wrong with Amy?

COLONEL. Nonsense—eh? Steve?

STEVE. Bless you, no. (*He sits on the Left arm of the sofa.*)

ALICE. Yes, it's much Steve knows about women!

STEVE. (*Rising; stung*) I'm not so unattractive to women, Alice, as you think.

ALICE. Listen to him, Robert!

COLONEL. (*Sitting back; banteringly*) What he means, my dear, is that you should see him with elderly ladies!

ALICE. (*Reprovingly*) Steve, this to people who know you!

STEVE. (*Darkly*) Don't be so sure, Alice, that you know me.

COLONEL. (*Enjoying himself*) Let us tell her, Steve! I'm dying to tell her.

STEVE. (*Grandly*) No, no.

COLONEL. We mustn't tell, Alice, because it's a woman's secret,—a poor little fond elderly woman—

ALICE. (*Turning from the mirror*) Fiddle-de-dee—

(*Her attention is caught by the efforts of AMY—who is invisible—to tug her skirt into the cupboard.*)

The COLONEL continues, as he pokes the fire, having noted that STEVE is a little piqued.)

COLONEL. See how he's ruffling his feathers! I shouldn't wonder, you know, if you and I are in the way tonight.

(He busies himself putting on more coal. STEVE suddenly notes ALICE's amused stare in the direction of the cupboard. He turns, in time to see AMY's hand drawing the corner of her skirt into the cupboard. STEVE and ALICE look at each other; he with consternation, she with mischievous amusement.)

ALICE. *(Crossing to Center, very casually)* May I look around me, Steve? I have been neglecting your room shamefully.

STEVE. *(Rising; alarmed)* No, no! Do sit down, Alice. There's nothing to see.

ALICE. *(Giving him a mischievous smile and turning towards up Left)* I like your clock.

STEVE. *(Moving towards her)* It's my landlady's. Nearly all the things except the books are hers. Do come back to the fire.

COLONEL. When I was a bachelor I used to have some pretty things of my own.

ALICE. Got any "pretty things" of your own, Steve?

STEVE. No! *(He tries to urge her to the fire.)*

ALICE. *(Eluding him and going up Center to the cupboard)* Is that a cupboard? *(The COLONEL sits up, looks round, and returns to his cigar, laughing)* What do you keep in it?

STEVE. *(Above the table, Left)* It's only crockery in there.

ALICE. *(Turning below and Right of the cupboard)* Not one little bit of china?

STEVE. No, no.

ALICE. May I peep in?

STEVE. *(With growing agitation)* No! no! no! *(He*

takes a pace up-stage, Left of the cupboard) Do sit down Alice!

COLONEL. (*Lounging back, smoking contentedly*) Don't mind her, Steve. (*ALICE opens the cupboard door and stares into the interior*) She never could see a door without itching to open it. (*ALICE closes the door, withdraws a pace, and turns to STEVE, swaying a little*) Well, have you found anything?

(*STEVE makes a sign to her, not to tell the COLONEL.*)

ALICE. (*Her eyes on STEVE*) No—just a dark little cupboard.

(*She glares at STEVE as if she would kill him, crosses to behind the COLONEL and puts her arms round his neck. STEVE can't understand her behaviour.*)

COLONEL. (*A little surprised, though used to her impulses*) Hallo! We mustn't let on that we are fond of each other before company.

STEVE. (*Moving up to Center*) Oh, I don't count—I'm such an old friend.

ALICE. (*Slowly, after looking at STEVE*) Such an old friend. (*She moves round the Left end of the sofa, crosses to the mantel, and leans over it, breaking down.*)

(*STEVE watches her, dazed and embarrassed.*)

COLONEL. (*Rising and going to her*) Worrying about the children still, Alice? (*He puts his cigar down.*)

ALICE. (*Turning and burying her face on his shoulder*) Yes, yes—I can't help breaking down when I think of them.

COLONEL. Poor soul! (*He pets her*) Would you like to go home now?

ALICE. (*To whom the word has suddenly a bitter meaning*) Home! (*She makes a decision*) But—yes—I'm tired—let us go—home.

COLONEL. (*Crossing quickly to the table Left Center*) Can we have a cab, Steve?

STEVE. (*Rousing himself*) I'll go down and whistle one. Alice, I'm awfully sorry that you— (*Glancing at the cupboard*) —that I—

ALICE. Please—a cab.

STEVE. All right. (*He exits quickly Right Center, after another glance at the cupboard.*)

COLONEL. (*Bringing ALICE'S cloak across to Right Center*) I think it is about Amy that you worry most.

ALICE. (*Near the mantel, her back to him*) Why should I, Robert?

COLONEL. Not a jot of reason. (*He throws the cloak over the back of the sofa, moves down, and turns her around*) But you seem troubled. (*He takes her hands.*)

ALICE. (*Longing for reassurance*) Say again, Robert, that everything is sure to come right just as we planned it would.

COLONEL. (*In just the tone she needed; patting her hand*) Of course it will.

(*ALICE gently disengages herself, and crosses to Left of the sofa. The COLONEL turns to watch her.*)

ALICE. Robert, there is something I want to tell you. You know how dear my children are to me, but Amy is the dearest of them all. She is dearer to me, Robert, than you yourself.

COLONEL. (*Glad that it should be so*) Very well, mem-sahib.

ALICE. (*Sitting on the Left arm of the sofa*) My dear, Amy has come to a time when she is neither quite a girl or a woman. There are dark places at that age, and we have to pick our way without much help. (*Looking at him*) I have thought so long of how I was to be within hail of my girl at this time, holding her hand— (*Her voice breaks a little*) My Amy—my child.

COLONEL. (*Moving up, below the Left end of the sofa;*

patting her shoulder) That is just how it is all to turn out, my Alice.

ALICE. (*Shivering a little*) Yes, isn't it? (*Looking at him*) Isn't it?

COLONEL. You dear excitable, of course it is.

ALICE. (*Standing*) But even though it were not, though I had come back too late, though my daughter had become a woman without my guidance, though she were a bad woman—

COLONEL. (*Retreating a pace*) Alice!

ALICE. Though some cur of a man—Robert, it wouldn't affect my love for her—I should love her more than ever. If all others turned from her, if *you* turned from her, Robert—how I should love her then.

COLONEL. (*Turning away to the fireplace*) Alice, don't talk of such things. (*He picks up his half-smoked cigar, and throws it in the fire.*)

ALICE. (*Having glanced at the cupboard and seen that the door is ajar, continues for AMY'S benefit. She sits again on the arm of the sofa*) I was only telling you that nothing could make any difference in my love for Amy. That's all. And of course, if she has ever been a little foolish—light-headed—at that age one often is—why, a mother would soon put all that right; she would take her in her arms, and talk it over, and the troubles would vanish. (*Almost gaily*) And do you think I should repeat any of Amy's confidences to you? No! Not a word! She could be sure of that.

(*The cupboard door closes softly.*)

COLONEL. (*Turning, catching her gaiety*) A pretty way to treat a father. (*Cab whistles are heard. He crosses to Left Center*) But you'll never persuade me there's any flaws in Amy.

ALICE. I'll never try, dear. (*She picks up her cloak and head wrap.*)

COLONEL. (*Moving to the window and looking out*) I think that's the cab.

ALICE. Yes, we'll go home. *(She goes above the sofa for her cloak.)*

COLONEL. *(Returning to Left Center)* And have it out with Amy.

ALICE. The first thing tomorrow.

COLONEL. Not a bit of it. The first thing we get home. *(He picks up his coat.)*

ALICE. *(Reacting, as she appreciates that she is up against a new danger)* You forget, dear, she has gone to bed.

COLONEL. *(Putting on his scarf)* We'll soon rout her out of bed.

ALICE. Robert! You forget she locked the door.

COLONEL. *(Putting on his coat)* Pooh! Sulky little darling. I daresay she's crying her eyes out for you already. But if she doesn't open that door to us pretty smartly I'll force it.

ALICE. You wouldn't do that!

COLONEL. *(Gaily)* Wouldn't I? Oh yes I would.

(STEVE enters. He moves to Center leaving the door wide open.)

STEVE. I've got a cab.

COLONEL. Thanks, Steve. You'll excuse us going off, I know. Now, Alice. *(He picks up his hat.)*

ALICE. *(Making signs to the puzzled STEVE that he must get AMY out of the house)* There's no dreadful hurry, is there? *(The COLONEL turns, surprised. ALICE points to the photograph on the wall down Left)* Are you in that group, Steve?

STEVE. Yes, it's an old school eleven.

ALICE. *(Crossing to Right of the table)* Let's see if we can pick Steve out, Robert. *(She puts her cloak on the table.)*

COLONEL. All right. *(He crosses down, Left of the table, and takes the photograph down from the wall. He scrutinises it, facing down Left.)*

(ALICE takes the opportunity to signal again to STEVE, imperiously. STEVE, still rather puzzled, goes up, opens the door and reveals AMY. He signs to her urgently that she must go but she shakes her head indignantly. During this brief action ALICE divides her attention between STEVE and the COLONEL.)

COLONEL. Here he is—the one with the ball—

ALICE. (Having noted STEVE's failure; crossing down to the COLONEL) Oh, no, that can't be Steve, surely. (She looks over his shoulder) Isn't this one more like him?

COLONEL. This is you, isn't it, Steve?

STEVE. (Joining them) Yes—the one with the ball.

COLONEL. I found you at once. (He replaces the photograph. ALICE and STEVE exchange gestures of despair) Now, Alice, your cloak.

(STEVE goes above the table for the cloak.)

ALICE. (Moving towards Right) I feel so comfy where I am. One does hate to leave the fire, doesn't one? (She hums a snatch of a song.)

COLONEL. (With comic despair; to STEVE) The woman doesn't know her own mind. (He takes the cloak from STEVE and crosses towards ALICE.)

ALICE. (Swaying to the song) You remember we danced to that one for my birthday, at Simla. (She seizes the COLONEL and dances a few steps, having taken her cloak and put in on the arm of the sofa.)

COLONEL. (Checking the dance) You flibbertygibbet—you make me dizzy. (He is now on her Right.)

ALICE. Shall we sit out the rest of this dance?

COLONEL. Not I. (He picks up her cloak) Come along, you unreasonable thing.

ALICE. (Left of the sofa) Unreasonable? Robert, I have a reason. I want to see if Amy will come.

COLONEL. Come—? (He sits on the sofa, looking at her astonished.)

STEVE. Come here? (He moves to Center.)

ALICE. (*Sitting on the Left arm of the sofa*) I didn't tell you before, Robert, because I had so little hope; but I called to her through the door that I was coming here to meet you, and I said, 'I don't believe you have a headache, Amy. I believe you have locked yourself in there because you hate the poor mother who loves you', and I begged her to come with me. I said, 'If you won't come now, come after me and make me happy'.

COLONEL. But what an odd message, Alice—so unlike you.

ALICE. Was it? I don't know. I find it so hard to be like myself.

COLONEL. (*Rising*) But, my dear—a young girl—

ALICE. She would take a cab. (*Rising*) Don't be so hard, Robert. Only a few minutes— I think I hear a cab—look out and see! (*The COLONEL crosses to the window Left, and looks out. ALICE waves STEVE across to the fire and he crosses obediently but mystified. ALICE rushes to the cupboard, drags AMY out, whirls her to her Right, and seems to greet her as if she has just entered by the door up Right Center*) Amy!

(*Seeing her father, AMY crosses ALICE, to Left Center.*)

COLONEL. (*Wheeling round from the window*) Not really? Hullo! I never for a moment—it was true, then! (*He moves to Left Center*) Amy, you are a good little girl to come.

STEVE. (*Who is staggered by this*) Amy! Is this your daughter, Alice? Then—you are the mother!

COLONEL. (*Jovially*) Well thought out! He is a master mind. Amy—my old friend Steve Rollo. Steve—this is our dear girl.

STEVE. (*Blinking*) How do you do?

AMY. (*Sternly*) How do you do?

COLONEL. (*With his arm round AMY*) Bless me, Amy, you are a swell!

AMY. It's only evening dress.

COLONEL. (*Chaffing*) I bet she didn't dress for me, Alice—she dressed for Steve.

ALICE. Yes, for Steve.

COLONEL. (*To AMY, who is fondling him*) Don't hang on me, my dear, hang on your mother. (*He passes her to ALICE*) Steve, what are you staring at Alice for?

ALICE. (*Trying to embrace AMY*) Amy, don't be afraid of me.

AMY. (*Coldly*) I'm not.

COLONEL. (*Exasperated by the atmosphere*) Then kiss and make it up. (*AMY and ALICE kiss perfunctorily and AMY turns back towards the COLONEL as if for protection, but he is not placated, and crosses to the table down Left for his hat*) This is too much. Wait till I get you home. (*Returning towards Left Center with his hat*) Are you both ready—

(*He checks, astonished, for AMY has picked up her glove from the chair Right of the table and is putting it on.*)

ALICE. (*Picking up her cloak*) We are ready, Robert—(*She notices his surprise*) What is it?

COLONEL. Steve knows what it is—Amy doesn't—yet. (*He is quiet, and not suspecting anything terrible so far*) The simple soul has given herself away so innocently that it's almost a shame to take notice of it. (*A little harder*) But I must, Steve. (*STEVE fidgets. The COLONEL puts his hat on the table*) Come, man, it can't be difficult to explain.

ALICE. Robert! You frighten me.

COLONEL. (*Crossing AMY to up Center*) Still tongue-tied, Steve? Before you came, Alice, I found a lady's glove on the floor.

(*STEVE immediately feels in his pocket for the glove.*)

ALICE. (*Startled*) That isn't our affair, Robert!

COLONEL. Yes. Amy has just put on that glove.

(AMY *easing down Left Center, hides her gloved hand behind her.*)

ALICE. (*By the Left end of the sofa*) It isn't hers!

COLONEL. Do you deny it's yours, Amy? (*No answer.*

AMY *brings her hand in front of her in a marked way. Turning to STEVE*) Is it unreasonable, Steve, to ask you when my daughter, with whom you confess to be unacquainted, gave you that token of her esteem?

(ALICE *flashes STEVE a warning glance.*)

STEVE. (*Helpless, and wishing to do whatever ALICE wants*) Alice—

COLONEL. What has Alice to do with it?

AMY. (*Turning quickly*) Nothing—nothing—I swear it!

(*Her vehemence disturbs the COLONEL. He looks at all three in turn, and then moves a pace towards AMY.*)

COLONEL. Has there been something going on that I don't understand? (*He turns to ALICE*) And are you in it, Alice, as well as they? Why has Steve been staring at you so?

AMY. (*Quickly*) Mother, don't answer.

STEVE. If I could see Alice alone for a moment, Colonel—

ALICE. Yes.

COLONEL. No. (*Looking from one to the other*) Good Heavens, what are you all concealing? (*Fixing his eye on STEVE*) Is Amy your elderly lady, Steve? (*ALICE moves above the sofa and puts down her cloak*) Or was that but some tasteful little joke you were playing upon your old friend— (*He takes a pace down towards Right Center*) —her father? Come, man, speak!

STEVE. (*Much troubled*) Colonel, I—

AMY. I forbid him to speak.

COLONEL. You?

ALICE. (*Moving down to the COLONEL*) Robert, let me explain—I—Steve—

AMY. (*To ALICE*) You mustn't—you dare not! (*Moving up Center, facing them*) Let all fall on me! It isn't true, Father, that Mr Rollo and I had not met before you introduced me.

ALICE. (*Crossing to her; distressed*) Amy—Amy!

AMY. (*Waving her away; crossing to STEVE*) It is my glove, but I was entitled to—give it to him. (*She holds out her hand towards STEVE in the grand stage manner*) He is my affianced husband!

(*ALICE, astounded, retreats a little up and Left. The COLONEL also backs a pace, his eyes still on AMY and STEVE. The latter backs a pace down Right.*)

STEVE. Colonel—

(*He checks as ALICE, behind the COLONEL, sends him a glance and shake of the head imploring him to desist.*)

COLONEL. (*Turning, after a pause, and moving towards ALICE; bewildered*) Alice, did you hear her?

ALICE. (*Quickly simulating happiness*) Surely you don't mean, Robert, that you are not glad?

COLONEL. (*Staring at her*) Is that how you take it?

ALICE. (*Riding her heartache*) How I take it? I'm overjoyed, don't you see how splendid it is? Our old friend, Steve.

COLONEL. (*Turning his eyes on STEVE*) My old friend Steve.

ALICE. (*Crossing Right*) Steve! Amy! (*She joins their hands, turns, and moves up Right Center*) Robert, he is to be our own son.

(*STEVE and AMY relinquish each other's hands.*)

COLONEL. (*Quietly*) Yes, Alice, you are very clever.

But do you think I believe this is no shock to you? Oh, woman, why has this deception not struck you to the ground?

ALICE. (*Brightly, as if suddenly seeing his mistake*) Deception—why— (*Turning to AMY and STEVE with a laugh*) Amy, Steve, I do believe he thinks this is as much a surprise to me as it is to him! (*Crossing to the COLONEL, still assuming glee*) Why my dear, I have known about it ever since—since I saw Amy this afternoon. She told me at once—and then in came Steve, and Steve—

COLONEL. Is it so bad that my wife must lie to me?

ALICE. (*Retreating from him*) Robert!

(AMY moves up Left of the sofa, away from STEVE.)

COLONEL. (*Moving to ALICE*) You felt there was something wrong from the first. How did you find out?

ALICE. Robert, they are engaged to be married—it was foolish of them to conceal it, but oh, my dear, leave it at that.

COLONEL. Why did you ask Amy to follow us here?

ALICE. So that we could all be together when we broke it to you, dear.

COLONEL. Another lie! My shoulders are broad, why shouldn't I have to bear it as well as you?

ALICE. There's nothing to bear but just a little folly.

COLONEL. Folly! And neither of them able to say a word?

(AMY is standing silent above the Left end of the sofa.)

STEVE. (*Crossing to between AMY and ALICE*) I could explain it all—if you would leave me with Alice for a moment.

COLONEL. (*Scornfully*) Ah! (*He crosses up to the cupboard, looks at it, and turns to the OTHERS. STEVE crosses Left*) Alice, that change came over you the

moment you opened that door. I remember it all now. (*Moving towards her*) What did you see in there?

(*AMY moves down below the Left end of the sofa.*)

ALICE. Nothing, dear. You are quite mistaken.

COLONEL. (*With sudden suspicion; looking at AMY*) My God!

ALICE. No, no, it wasn't, Robert, it wasn't, it wasn't!

COLONEL. (*With a pace towards STEVE*) Was Amy there? (*There is no answer. The COLONEL turns, and goes up to the cupboard. The OTHERS watch. He opens the cupboard, pause, and turns back to them with AMY'S other glove in his hand. After looking at ALICE, then at STEVE, he crosses down to AMY in silence*) You had dropped this one also.

(*AMY takes the glove. ALICE and STEVE exchange a look. The COLONEL moves away up Right Center.*)

ALICE. I can't keep it from you any longer, Robert. I have done my best. (*She crosses to AMY, protectingly*) But Amy is still my child.

COLONEL. (*Crossing Left to STEVE*) Well, sir? (*STEVE is helpless*) Still waiting for that interview with my wife before you can say anything?

STEVE. (*Desperately*) Yes!

ALICE. You will have every opportunity of explaining, Steve—many opportunities, but in the meantime—just now—please go—leave us alone. (*STEVE hesitates*) Steve, won't you go?

STEVE. (*Crossing to Right Center*) Anything you ask me to do—anything. I shall only be upstairs, so that if you want me—

ALICE. Oh, go.

(*STEVE, now uncertain how she regards him, crosses up Right and exits. A pause.*)

COLONEL. You're wondrous lenient with him. *I shall have more to say. (Indicating AMY) Look at her standing there—seems rather proud of herself.*

(AMY is maintaining a proud carriage.)

ALICE *(Crossing to him)* It isn't really hardness, Robert. It's because she thinks you are hard. Robert, I want you to go away, too, and leave Amy to me. Go home, Robert; we shall soon follow.

COLONEL. If you wish it. *(He looks at AMY.)*

ALICE. *(Taking him up to the door)* Leave her with her mother. *(The COLONEL exits Right Center. ALICE closes the door, and pauses there. Then she moves down to Center. The front door is heard to slam. AMY suddenly sinks on the sofa, bows her head and sobs as if her heart would break. ALICE goes to her, and sits on her Left) Amy!*

AMY. *(Drawing away from her, shuddering)* I wonder you can touch me.

ALICE. The more you ask of your mother the more she has to give. It is my love you need, Amy—and you can draw upon it and draw upon it. *(Finding no response)* My child, I am not saying one harsh word to you— *(AMY seems to withdraw further into herself. ALICE loses patience)* Take care, Amy, or I shall begin to believe your father was right. What do you think would happen if I were to leave you to him?

AMY. *(Rising; distressed)* Poor father! *(She moves to the fireplace.)*

ALICE. Poor indeed with such a daughter.

AMY. *(Turning, and moving across Left)* He's gone, Mother, so do you really think you need keep up this pretence before me?

ALICE *(Rising)* What you need is a whipping.

AMY. *(Turning to her at Left Center)* You ought to know what I need!

ALICE. *(For a moment, ALICE is speechless with indignation. Then all her love possesses her again. She*

crosses towards AMY) Amy—Amy, it was all Steve's fault.

AMY. (*Backing a little to the chair Right of the table*) You needn't expect me to believe that.

ALICE. (*Staggered; checking at Center*) No doubt you thought him at the beginning a gallant gentleman!

AMY. Not at all, I knew he was deprived from the moment I set eyes on him. (*She sits.*)

ALICE. (*Aghast*) Amy! Then how—how—

AMY. Ginevra knew too.

ALICE. Ginevra knew?

AMY. We planned it together—to treat him in the same way as Sir Harry Peskill and Mr. Grayling.

ALICE. (*Crossing to AMY*) Amy, you are not in your senses— (*Kneeling by her*) You don't mean that there was someone else.

AMY. Yes, there was a Major—Major—I forgot his name, but he was another.

ALICE. (*Shaking her*) Wretched girl!

AMY. Leave go!

ALICE. How did you get to know them?

AMY. Know them? They are characters in plays.

ALICE. (*Bewildered*) Characters in plays? *Plays?*

AMY. We went to five last week.

ALICE. (*Rising; excitedly*) Amy! Tell me—when did you see Steve for the first time?

AMY. When you were saying good-bye to him this afternoon.

ALICE. (*Dances down Right Center, and turns, with delight in her eyes*) Can it be true?

AMY. Perhaps we shouldn't have listened, but they always do listen when there's a screen.

ALICE. Listened? What did you hear?

AMY. Everything! We saw him kiss you and heard you make an assignation to meet him here!

ALICE. (*Moving excitedly to Center*) I shall whip you directly, but go on, darling!

AMY. (*Rising; childishly*) You shan't whip me! (*Dramatically*) As in a flash Ginevra and I saw there was

only one way to save you. I must go to his room, and force him to return the letters.

ALICE. (*Inspired*) What letters?

AMY. Of course I knew they were merely foolish letters, compromising but innocent.

ALICE. (*Turning away to conceal mirth*) Thank you, darling. (*She moves Right to below the sofa as if moved.*)

AMY. (*Moving to Center*) He behaved at first just as they all do—pretended he didn't know what I was talking about. At that moment, a visitor. I knew at once that it must be the husband. It always is—it was—I hid. Again, a visitor. I knew it must be you—it was. Oh, the agony to me, in there! I was wondering when he would begin to suspect, and I stood ready, the moment he did, to emerge and sacrifice myself to save you.

ALICE. (*Turning*) As you have done, Amy.

AMY. As I have done. (*ALICE is almost beside herself with relief, and goes to take AMY in her arms. AMY recoils. Coldly*) I want none of that.

ALICE. (*Retreating a pace, with assumed humility*) Forgive me—I had forgotten. (*She is suddenly struck by a delightful thought*) Steve! Does he know what you think—about me?

AMY. I had to be open with him.

ALICE. (*Ecstatically*) And he believes it! He thinks that I—I, Alice Grey—

AMY. You need not pretend. (*WARN Curtain.*)

ALICE. (*As if it were a tragic problem*) What's to be done?

AMY. (*Bravely*) Though I abhor him, I must marry him. (*Sombrely*) Ginevra is to be my only bridesmaid. We are both to wear black.

ALICE. (*Suppressing a giggle; then speaking sharply*) You are sure you don't rather like him, Amy?

AMY. Mother!

ALICE. Amy, weren't you terrified to come alone to the rooms of a man you didn't even know? Some men—

AMY. I was not afraid—I am a soldier's daughter—and— (*Taking out a tiny dagger*) Ginevra gave me this.

(*This is altogether too much for ALICE. She goes to AMY and takes her in her arms.*)

AMY. (*Yielding a little*) It's—no use. I must bear my misery alone.

ALICE. Is that what they do in the plays?

AMY. (*Puzzled and unhappy*) The plays somehow always end happily.

ALICE. End happily! (*Suddenly inspired*) Amy! It is only nine o'clock; why shouldn't we go to the theatre—one of the theatres where this sort of thing happens, and see—see, Amy, whether we can learn from it how to end happily?

AMY. (*Carried away*) Oh, if we only could!

ALICE. It's worth trying!

AMY. But—father?

ALICE. I'll send him a note by one of these messenger boys— (*She crosses for her cloak and puts it on*) I expect he has left the cab for us.

AMY. Let's go at once— (*She crosses Right Center and helps ALICE.*)

ALICE. (*Taking her hands*) You do love me a little, Amy, don't you?

AMY. Yes—yes!

ALICE. You don't think I have been really bad, dear?

AMY. Oh, no—only foolish.

ALICE. (*Embracing her*) Thank you, Amy.

AMY. (*Drawing her towards the door*) The theatre, Mother.

ALICE. (*As they go to the door*) Yes—the theatre—

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE: *As in Act I. Later, the same night.*

When the Curtain rises, COSMO is on the sofa, asleep, and facing Left. GINEVRA is seated Left of the table, a book on her lap, but she is not reading. Her hat and cloak are on the piano stool.

After a moment, COSMO awakes with a start, sits up, and turns to regard GINEVRA.

COSMO. Hullo—you've been asleep.

GINEVRA. How like a man.

COSMO. I say—I thought you were the one who had stretched herself out, and that I was sitting here, very quiet, so as not to awaken you.

GINEVRA. Let us leave it at that.

COSMO. Huffy, aren't you? Haven't they come back yet?

GINEVRA. They have not. And half-past eleven has struck. I oughtn't to stay any longer. As it is, I don't know what my landlady will say.

COSMO. (*Rising and going to the fire*) I'll see you to your place whenever you like. (*With his back to the fire*) My uniform will make it all right for you.

GINEVRA. You child. (*She rises, and moves up Center, putting her book with her hat and cloak*) But I simply can't go till I know what has happened. Where can they be?

COSMO. That's all right. Father said he had a message from Mother saying they had gone to the theatre.

GINEVRA. (*Moving down Left Center*) But why?

COSMO. (*Moving to the Right arm of the sofa*) Yes, it seemed to bother him, too. (*He sits on the sofa arm.*)

GINEVRA. The theatre. (*Turning to above the table*) That is what she said.

COSMO. (*Standing erect; a little indignant*) Look here, Miss Dunbar, it may be that I have a little crow to pick with Mother when she comes back, but I cannot allow anyone else to say a word against her. *Comprenez?*

(*Before GINEVRA can reply, AMY enters up Left Center, her eyes sparkling. She moves down, and GINEVRA goes to her impulsively.*)

GINEVRA. Amy—at last!

AMY. (*After a glance at COSMO*) Sh! (*She returns to the door and speaks to someone off-stage*) There are only Ginevra and Cosmo here—

(*She stands Left of the door. Then ALICE enters. She is assuming a humility which she does not feel, to satisfy AMY, and thoroughly enjoying the pretence.*)

ALICE. (*Moving down*) Where shall I sit, dear?

AMY. (*Taking her to the chair Left of the table*) Here, dear.

ALICE. Thank you, Amy. (*She sits. AMY takes off her own cloak and puts it on the music cabinet Left of the piano. To COSMO*) Where is your father, Cosmo? (*COSMO indicates with a gesture to the ceiling that the COLONEL is upstairs. To AMY*) Shall I go to him, Amy?

AMY. (*Moving down to Left of ALICE*) If you think you feel strong enough, dear.

ALICE. You have given me strength.

AMY. I'm so glad! (*Touching her hair*) What will you tell him?

ALICE. (*Rising*) All, Amy—all, all!

AMY. Brave Mother!

ALICE. (*Turning to AMY*) Who could not be brave with such a daughter? (*Turning to COSMO*) And such a son!

(*She moves up Left Center and exits. AMY and GINEVRA rush to each other, but remember the presence of COSMO just in time. They glance at him.*)

COSMO. (*Inquisitively*) I say, what is she going to tell Father?

AMY. Oh, nothing!

GINEVRA. Mr. Grey, you promised to see me home!

COSMO. (*Crossing to Right of the sofa*) Righto!

GINEVRA. But you haven't got your boots on.

COSMO. (*Crossing up to the door*) I won't be a minute. (*He turns at the door*) I say, I believe you're trying to get rid of me. (*Moving down a little*) Look here, I won't budge till you tell me what mother is speaking about to father.

AMY. (*Crossing Left to below the sofa*) Oh—it's about the drawing room curtains.

COSMO. Good Lord!

(*He exits unsuspectingly Right Center, and closes the door. AMY turns, and the girls exchange a look. Then GINEVRA runs to AMY; as they talk, their faces are very close to each other.*)

GINEVRA. Quick, Amy, did you get the letters?

AMY. There are no letters.

GINEVRA. (*Starting back*) No letters? How unlike life! (*Then, going closer*) You're quite sure?

AMY. I have my mother's word for it.

GINEVRA. Then it can't have gone far!

AMY. No—merely a painful indiscretion. (*She continues, crossing to below the table Right Center*) But if father had known of it— (*Turning to GINEVRA*) —you know what husbands are.

GINEVRA. (*Following to below the chair Left of the table*) Yes, indeed! Did he follow her? (*AMY nods*) Did you hide? (*AMY nods again.*)

AMY. To deceive him I had to pretend that I was the woman— (*Moving away to below the table*) And now, Ginevra, can you guess? (*She looks down modestly as she has observed it done at the theatre.*)

GINEVRA. (*Breathless, close to her*) You don't mean—?

AMY. (*Turned away*) I think I do—but what do you mean?

GINEVRA. I mean—the great thing!

AMY. Then it is, yes! (*Turning to GINEVRA*) Ginevra, I am affianced to the man Steve!

GINEVRA. (*Holding her at arms' length, then embracing her*) Oh! (*She sits Left of the table holding AMY's hands, drawing her closer*) You seem the same, Amy, yet somehow different!

AMY. (*Releasing herself and moving to Left Center*) That's just how I feel! (*She looks at the ceiling. GINEVRA looks at her, and then follows her gaze*) They are overhead, Ginevra. There's an awful scene taking place— (*Pointing up*) —up there! She is telling father all!

GINEVRA. Confessing?

AMY. Everything—in a noble attempt to save me from a widowed marriage.

GINEVRA. But I thought she was such a hard woman.

AMY. Not really. To the world, perhaps. (*Sitting on the arm of the sofa*) But I have softened her. All she needed, Ginevra, to bring out her finer qualities was a strong nature to lean upon; and she says she has found it in me. At the theatre, and all the way home—

GINEVRA. Then you *did* go to the theatre! Why?

AMY. Need you ask? Oh, Ginevra, to see if we could find a happy ending.

GINEVRA. Which theatre?

AMY. I don't know, but the erring wife confessed all—in one of those crêpe de chins that are so fashionable this year, and mother and I sat— (*Her voice trembles a little*) clasping each other's hands, praying it might end happily, though we didn't see how it could.

GINEVRA. How awful for you! What did the husband do?

AMY. (*Rising*) He was very calm and white. He went out of the room for a moment, and came back so white. Then he sat down by the fire and nodded his head three times.

GINEVRA. I think I know *now* which theatre it was.

AMY. He asked her coldly—but always the perfect gentleman—

GINEVRA. Oh, *that* theatre!

AMY. He asked her whether *he* was to go, or she.

GINEVRA. (*Rising and moving towards AMY*) They must part?

AMY. (*At Left Center*) Yes! She went on her knees to him, and said, 'Are we never to meet again?' and he replied huskily, 'Never.' Then she turned and went slowly towards the door.

GINEVRA. (*Clutching her*) Amy—was that the end?

AMY. No. At that moment—

GINEVRA. Yes—yes?

AMY. The door opened, and, Ginevra, their little child—came in—in her night-gown—

(*Her voice breaks a little. GINEVRA is much affected.*)

GINEVRA. Quick!

AMY. She came toddling down the stairs—she took in the whole situation at a glance—and, running to her father, she said, 'Daddy, if Mother goes away, what is to become of me?' (*Both girls gulp*) And then—she took a hand of each and drew them together till they fell on each other's breasts, and then—oh, Ginevra, then—click! And the curtain fell.

(*They embrace, sobbing. After a moment, they compose themselves a little.*)

GINEVRA. (*Wiping her eyes*) How old was the child?

AMY. (*Borrowing GINEVRA'S handkerchief, and wiping her own eyes*) Five—she looked more. (*She crosses down Center.*)

GINEVRA. Molly is under two, isn't she?

AMY. (*Sadly*) Yes. (*She sits, Left of the table.*)

GINEVRA. She couldn't possibly do it. (*She eases up to Left Center.*)

AMY. No. I thought of that. She couldn't—even if she was held up. But mother couldn't help thinking the scene was a good omen. (*She looks up at the ceiling, and once more GINEVRA follows her glance*) How still they are.

GINEVRA. Perhaps she hasn't the courage to tell.

AMY. (*Resolutely; rising*) If so, I must go on with it.

GINEVRA. Marry him?

AMY. (*Crossing to below the sofa*) Yes. I must dree my weird. (*Thinking*) Is it dree your weird, or weird your dree?

GINEVRA. I think they both do. (*Passionately, moving to up Right Center*) Oh, Amy, why can't I make some sacrifice as well as you?

(*There is a knock at the door up Left Center. The girls start, and turn to look at the door. STEVE enters, and pauses in the doorway.*)

AMY. You!

STEVE. (*Closing the door*) I felt I must come. (*He moves down and puts his hat on the sofa table*) Miss Grey, I am in the greatest distress, as the unhappy cause of all this trouble.

AMY. (*Below the sofa, facing him*) You should have thought of that before.

STEVE. Yes, it was dense of me not to understand sooner—very dense! Must I marry you, Miss Grey?

AMY. Ah, *that* is what you are sorry for! (*She turns to the mantelpiece.*)

STEVE. (*Moving to below the Right end of the sofa*) Yes, horribly sorry! (*AMY half turns*) Not for myself—to tell the truth I'd be—precious glad to risk it—I think.

AMY. (*After a glance towards GINEVRA*) You would!

STEVE. But very sorry for you. It seems such a shame to you— (*GINEVRA comes slowly down Center*) So

young and attractive—and the little you know of me, so—unfortunate!

AMY. (*Moved*) You mean you could never love me?

STEVE. (*Earnestly*) I don't mean that at all!

AMY. Ginevra!

(STEVE turns and sees GINEVRA.)

GINEVRA. (*A trifle imperiously*) Amy—introduce me!

AMY. Mr Stephen Rollo—Miss Dunbar! (STEVE bows) Miss Dunbar knows all!

GINEVRA. (*With a gesture as if brushing AMY aside*) May I ask, Mr Rollo, what are your views about woman?

STEVE. Really, I—

GINEVRA. Is she, in your opinion, her husband's equal, or is she his chattel?

STEVE. Honestly, I am so beside myself—

GINEVRA. You evade my question.

AMY. (*Hoarsely, as one who has heard her doom*) He means chattel, Ginevra.

GINEVRA. Mr Rollo—I am the friend till death of Amy Grey—let that poor child go, sir, and I am prepared to take her place beside you— (STEVE backs up, Right of the sofa table, feeling behind him for his hat) yes, at the altar's mouth.

AMY. (*Startled*) Ginevra!

GINEVRA. (*Repeating her previous gesture*) Understand, I can neither love nor honour you—at least, at first—but I will obey you!

AMY. (*Moving to Left of STEVE*) Ginevra, you take too much upon yourself!

GINEVRA. I will—make a sacrifice—I will!

AMY. You shan't!

GINEVRA. I feel that I understand this gentleman as no other woman ever could. It is my mission, Amy—

(STEVE grabs his hat, but swings round as ALICE enters up Left Center. She pauses in the doorway.)

ALICE. You here?

(GINEVRA turns and moves to above the table. AMY stands, alert, watching.)

STEVE. How could I help coming? (He puts his hat down again.)

AMY. (Crossing to Left of ALICE, up Center, and taking her hand) Mother, have you—did you—?

ALICE. I have told him all!

STEVE. The Colonel?

(ALICE bows her head.)

AMY. (Leading ALICE down to the chair Left of the table) Brave! Brave! (ALICE sits) What has he decided?

ALICE. He hasn't decided yet. He is thinking out what will be best to do.

(A slight pause. Then AMY turns to STEVE.)

AMY. Then, sir, as far as I am concerned—you are free!

(She turns, and crosses to GINEVRA, who meets her at Right Center, above the table.)

GINEVRA. It's almost a pity— (They clasp each other) At least, Amy, this makes us friends again!

(They embrace.)

ALICE. (With gentle firmness) Cosmo is waiting for you, Miss Dunbar, to see you home.

GINEVRA. I must go! (She goes to the piano stool for her hat, cloak, and book. Carrying them, she moves down Left of ALICE's chair, shakes hands very coldly, turns to STEVE and bows with some condescension) Mr Rollo, I am sure there is much good in you. (She

turns up to AMY) Darling Amy, I shall be round first thing in the morning.

(They kiss. AMY takes GINEVRA up Left Center to the door. They exit to the hall.)

STEVE. Now that she has gone, can we—have a talk?

(AMY re-enters.)

ALICE. (*Who has not seen her*) Yes, Steve. (*Her eyes are cast down.*)

AMY. (*Gently, like a mother to a child, as she moves down Left Center*) Mother, what was that you called him?

ALICE. (*To STEVE*) Dear Amy, I forgot! Yes, Mr Rollo.

STEVE. Then, Alice—

AMY. (*To STEVE; coldly*) This lady's name, if I am not greatly mistaken, is Mrs Grey! Is it not so, Mother?

ALICE. Yes, Amy.

STEVE. As you will, but it is important I should have some talk with her at once. (*He moves to the fire, and turns there.*)

ALICE. What do you think, dear?

AMY. (*After reflection*) If it be clearly understood that this is "goodbye," I consent. (*She takes ALICE to the sofa. ALICE sits*) Please be as brief as possible.

(*She crosses up Center, takes her work-basket from the piano, crosses down to Right of the table, puts it down, turns the chair slightly away from them, sits and takes up her work. STEVE watches all this, aghast.*)

STEVE. (*Exasperated; crossing to Left of the table*) But I want to see her alone!

AMY. (*Rising*) That I am afraid I cannot permit!
(*STEVE turns up, above the chair, agitated. To ALICE*)

It is not that I have not perfect confidence in you, Mother, but you must see I am acting wisely!

ALICE. Yes, Amy!

STEVE. (*To ALICE*) What has come over you? You don't seem the same woman!

AMY. That is just it—she is not!

ALICE. I see now only through Amy's eyes!

AMY. They will not fail you, Mother! (*She sits again, with her back slightly to the others, and resumes her sewing*) Proceed, sir.

(*STEVE, conscious of her presence, is embarrassed.*

ALICE is tickled, but demure. STEVE gives AMY a nervous glance, and then moves to near the Right arm of the sofa.)

STEVE. (*To ALICE*) You told him, then, about your feelings for me?

ALICE. He knows exactly what are my feelings for you.

STEVE. (*Huskily*) How did he take it?

ALICE. Need you ask?

(*STEVE concludes that the COLONEL was overwhelmed.*

So does AMY, who drops a stitch and then goes on sewing bravely.)

STEVE. Poor old boy. I suppose he wishes me to stay away from your house now.

ALICE. Will it be very hard, St—Mr. Rollo?

STEVE. It isn't that. You see, I'm fond of the Colonel, I really am, and it hurts me to think that I—it wasn't my fault, was it?

AMY. (*Without looking up from her work*) Ungenerous.

(*STEVE gives a start at the sound of her voice.*)

ALICE. He quite understands that it was I who lost my head.

(STEVE is much moved. He hesitates, then fetches the chair from Left of the table to Right of the sofa, sits, and lowers his voice.)

STEVE. Of course, I blame myself now—but I assure you, honestly, that I had no idea of it until tonight. I thought that you were only my friend. It dazed me. But as I ransacked my mind, many little things came back to me. (*His voice a little lower still*) I remembered what I hadn't noticed at the time—

AMY. (*Again without turning*) Louder, please.

STEVE. (*After a nervous glance back at AMY*) I remembered—

AMY. (*As before*) Is this necessary?

(STEVE sits back in despair. ALICE takes pity on him.)

ALICE. Please, Amy, let me know what he remembered.

(*A pause, which they take for consent. STEVE leans forward and speaks a little tenderly.*)

STEVE. I remembered that your voice was softer to me than when you were addressing other men.

ALICE. (*Who has kept her countenance with difficulty*) Let me look long at you, Mr Rollo!

(*They look at each other. A pause.*)

AMY. (*With gentle warning—looking at them*) Mother, enough!

(ALICE looks away.)

STEVE. (*Lowering his voice again.* It's strange to me now that I didn't understand your true meaning today when you said I was the only man you couldn't flirt with. You meant that I aroused deeper feelings.

ALICE. How you know me!

AMY. (*With emotion*) No, not the best of you, Mother!

ALICE. No, Amy, not the best!

STEVE. I can honestly say that I never thought of myself as possessing dangerous qualities. I thought I was utterly unattractive to women!

ALICE. You *must* have known about your eyes!

(AMY *wipes her eyes.*)

STEVE. (*Eagerly*) My eyes? On my soul I didn't!

ALICE. (*Wondering if she can control herself much longer, rises, and goes to the fireplace, speaking as she crosses*) Steve, if you don't go away at once, I shall scream!

STEVE. (*Sitting back; unhappily*) Is it as bad as that? I'm very sorry.

AMY. (*Putting her work away on the table*) You heard what Mrs. Grey said. This is very painful to her. (*She rises*) Will you please say good-bye. (*She moves up above the table.*)

(STEVE *rises, takes the chair back to Left of the table, and crosses to Right of the sofa table. After a slight hesitation, ALICE crosses slowly to below the chair Left of the table, and looks at AMY.*)

ALICE. How shall we do it, Amy? On—the brow?

AMY. No, Mother—with the hand.

(ALICE *turns to face up to STEVE, who moves down on her Left, slightly above her. She gives him her hand. He bends over it and kisses it. The COLONEL enters up Left Center and sees this. He would laugh, were it not that ALICE flashes him a warning look. He decides to play up to the situation, and becomes the outraged husband.*)

COLONEL. (*Below the door*) Ha!

(STEVE goes up for his hat, grabs it, and backs down, Right of the sofa and to below it, as the COLONEL advances.)

STEVE. I am going, Colonel. I am very sorry that you— at the same time, I wish you to understand that it was all my fault.

COLONEL. (*Moving down, below the Right end of the sofa*) Ha!

(ALICE moves up, above the Left end of the table. AMY goes to her, and puts her arm around her.)

AMY. Father, he only came to say good-bye. He is not a bad man—and mother has behaved magnificently.

(ALICE hugs her.)

COLONEL. (*As if sceptical*) Ha!

AMY. (*Crossing to him. Fearfully*) Father, what are you going to do? Don't be cruel to her!

COLONEL. (*With awful sternness*) Child, go to your room!

(AMY stares for a moment, then turns, and flies from the room in tears. The COLONEL follows her to the Left Center door, closes it, and returns down Left Center. He and ALICE are now rocking with laughter.)

ALICE. (*Pointing to STEVE*) Oh, Robert, look at him! He thinks I worship him!

COLONEL. Steve—you colossal puppy!

STEVE. (*Below the sofa*) Eh—what—why?

ALICE. Steve—tell Robert about my voice being softer to you than the other men—tell him, Steve, about your eyes! (*She sits on the chair Left of the table.*)

STEVE. (*Moving to Right of the sofa*) Good heavens! Was there nothing in it?

COLONEL. (*Clapping him on the shoulder*) My boy, I'll never let you hear the end of this!

STEVE. But if there's nothing in it, how could your daughter have thought—

COLONEL. (*Prodding him in the chest*) She saw you kiss Alice here this afternoon, you scoundrel, and, as she thought, arrange a assignation with you—there! (*He crosses to above ALICE'S chair.*)

STEVE. (*Sitting against the arm of the sofa*) But—but—then why did you pretend before her, Alice?

ALICE. Because she thinks she has saved me, and it makes her so happy. (*Rising, and crossing to STEVE*) Amy has a passionate desire to be of some use, in this world she knows so well, and she already sees her sphere, Steve—it is to look after me. I am not to be her chaperone, it is *she* who is to be mine.

STEVE. I see.

COLONEL. (*Fidgeting*) She seems to have quite given me up for you.

ALICE. (*Turning; blandly*) Oh, yes, Robert, quite.

(*The COLONEL is not too pleased.*)

STEVE. (*Gloomily*) You'll excuse my thinking only of myself. What an ass I've been.

ALICE. Is it a blow, Steve?

STEVE. It's a come-down. Ass, ass, ass! (*Sincerely*) But I say, Alice, I'm awfully glad it's I who have been the ass, and not you.

(*ALICE gives STEVE a comforting pat, glances laughingly at the COLONEL, and crosses STEVE to below the sofa.*)

STEVE. (*Moving to Left Center*) I really am, Colonel. You see, the tragedy of my life is I'm such a very ordinary sort of fellow that though every man I know says

some lady has loved him, there never in all my unromantic life was a woman who cared a Christmas card for me. It often makes me lonely—and so when I thought such a glorious woman as you, Alice—I lost touch of earth altogether—but now I've fallen back on it, with a whack! But I'm glad—yes, I'm glad. (*Taking both their hands and shaking them twice silently*) You two kindest people Steve Rollo has ever known. (*He turns up and gets his hat*) Oh, I say, goodnight! I suppose you can't overlook it, Alice.

ALICE. Oh yes, you goose, I can. We are both fond of you—Mr. Rollo.

COLONEL. (*Taking him up Left Center*) Come in, my boy, and make love to me as often as you like.

STEVE. (*To the COLONEL*) I may still come in to see you? (*He opens the door, and turns*) I say I'm awfully taken with your Amy.

COLONEL. None of that, Steve!

ALICE. (*Who has moved to the fire*) We can drop in on you, on the sly, Steve, but you mustn't come here—until Amy thinks it is safe for me! (*STEVE exits, followed by the COLONEL. ALICE crosses to Center, speaking to herself*) Until I think it is safe for Amy—

(*The front door slams. The COLONEL re-enters.*)

COLONEL. (*Moving down to the fire*) He's not a bad sort, Steve.

ALICE. Oh, no. Some day, Amy might do worse. But she is to be my little girl for a long time first. (*She eases to above the chair Left of the table.*)

COLONEL. (*Standing with his back to the fire*) This will give him a sort of glamour to her, you know.

ALICE. (*Easing to Left of the chair*) You are not really thinking, Robert, that Amy is to fall asleep to-night before she hears the whole true story. As if I could sleep until she knows everything!

COLONEL. Stupid of me. (*He moves to below the Right end of the sofa, taking out his pipe and pouch*) I'm a

little like Steve in one way, though. I don't understand why you have kept it up so long. (*He fills his pipe.*)

ALICE. (*Moving towards him*) It isn't the first time you have thought me a harum-scarum.

COLONEL. (*Grimly*) It isn't.

ALICE. (*Fingering his coat lovingly*) The sheer fun of it, Robert, went to my head. And then, you see, the more Amy felt herself to be my protectress, the more she seemed to love me. (*Moving away a pace*) I'm afraid I have a weakness for the short-cuts to being loved.

COLONEL. (*Lighting his pipe*) I'm afraid you have. The one thing you didn't think of is that the more she loves you the less love she seems to have for me. (*He moves up to Right of the sofa table.*)

ALICE. How selfish of you, Robert!

COLONEL. (*Turning to look at her; suspiciously*) Or was that all part of the plan?

ALICE. (*Moving away to Left of the chair Left of the table*) There was no plan. There was no time for one. (*She turns and leans back against the Left arm of the chair*) But you were certainly rather horrid in the way you gloated over me when you saw them take to you. I have been gloating a little, perhaps, in taking them from you.

COLONEL. Them? (*He puts down his pipe and moves towards her*) You are going a little too fast, my dear. I have still got Cosmo and Molly.

ALICE. (*Complacently*) For the moment.

COLONEL. (*Warningly*) Woman!

ALICE. (*Gaily*) Remember, Amy said you must not call me that! (*He laughs as he takes her by the shoulders*) Yes, shake me! I deserve it!

COLONEL. (*Shaking her with a comic ferocity*) You do indeed!

ALICE. Robert! Don't hurt me— (*COSMO enters up Left Center. Only ALICE sees him, out of the corner of her eye*) Oh—if Cosmo were to see you!

COSMO. (*Coming down, above and between them*) Cosmo does see him!

(ALICE backs to the chair. The COLONEL also retreats a pace.)

COLONEL. (*Feeling a little foolish*) I didn't hear you come in.

COSMO. (*Grimly*) I'm sure you didn't.

COLONEL. (*A trifle testily*) No heroics, my boy.

COSMO. Take care, Father— (*The COLONEL turns away, moving Left, trying to conceal a sudden grin*) You may laugh, sir. I don't know what this row's about, but— (*Putting his arm around ALICE*) This lady is my mother and I won't have her bullied.

ALICE. Cosmo—darling Cosmo!

COLONEL. (*Turning; alarmed*) My boy, it was only in fun. (*To ALICE*) Alice, tell him it was only in fun.

ALICE. He says it was only in fun, Cosmo.

COSMO. You're a trump to shield him, Mother. (*He kisses her.*)

COLONEL. (*Looking at ALICE*) You—serpent.

COSMO. (*With a pace towards the COLONEL*) Sir, this language won't do.

COLONEL. (*Exasperated*) You go to bed, too.

ALICE. He has sent Amy to bed already. (*Putting her hand on COSMO's arm*) Try to love your father, Cosmo. (*She kisses the spot where she slapped him*) Try for my sake, and try to get Amy and Molly to do it, too. (*Sweetly, to the COLONEL*) They will love you in time, Robert. At present, they can only think of me. (*To COSMO*) Darling, I'll come and see you in bed.

COSMO. I don't like to leave you with him—

ALICE. Go, dear. I promise to call out if I need you.

(*After a slight hesitation and glance at the COLONEL, COSMO exits. The long-suffering COLONEL surveys ALICE, his arms folded, slowly shaking his head.*)

COLONEL. You are a hussy. (*He eases away to below the sofa.*)

ALICE. (*Meekly*) I suppose I am.

COLONEL. (*Turning sharply*) Mind you, I am not going to stand Cosmo's thinking this of me.

ALICE. (*Moving to the sofa*) As if I would allow it for an hour! (*She sits on the arm of the sofa*) You won't see much of me tonight, Robert. If I sleep at all, it will be in Amy's room.

COLONEL. (*Easing to her, on her Left*) You'll be taking Molly from me tomorrow.

ALICE. I feel hopeful that Molly, too, will soon be taking care of me. With so many chaperones, Robert, I ought to do well. (*Putting her hand on his arm*) Oh, my dear, don't think that I have learnt no lesson tonight.

COLONEL. (*Smiling*) Going to reform at last?

ALICE. (*Seriously*) Yes. The Alice you have known is come to an end. Tomorrow—

COLONEL. If she is different tomorrow I'll disown her.

ALICE. It's summer done—autumn begun. Farewell, summer—we don't know you any more. My girl and I are like the little figures in the weather-house. When Amy comes out, Alice goes in. Alice-Sit-By-The-Fire henceforth. (*Looking at the COLONEL with a smile*) I had a beautiful husband once—black as the raven was his hair—

COLONEL. Stop it.

ALICE. Handsome Robert—farewell. Farewell, Alice that was—it's all over, my dear. I always had a weakness for you, but now you must go. (*She slips off the arm of the sofa, and moves towards Center*) Make way for the old lady.

COLONEL. Woman, you'll make me cry. Go to your Amy.

ALICE. (*Turning*) Robert—

COLONEL. Go. Go. Go!—

(AMY appears in the doorway up Left Center. She is in her night-gown, her hair is down, her feet are bare. She looks very much a child. ALICE cannot resist the temptation.)

ALICE. (*Wailing*) Must I go, Robert?

AMY. (*Moving down between them*) Going away?
Mother! (*She turns to the COLONEL*) Father, if Mother
goes away what is to become of me?

(*Taking one of each of their hands, she draws them
together, a beatific smile on her face.*)

CURTAIN

ALICE SIT-BY-THE-FIRE

FURNITURE & PROPERTY PLOT

ACTS I & III

Carpet on stage. Rug at fire-place. Strips in hall and passage off-stage.

Pictures on walls. (As described in the play.)

Oval 3-flap table. (Decorated as described in play.)

Dark wood chair with arms. (Left of table, decorated as described; loose cushion on it.)

2 small chairs at table.

1 small chair down Right. (On it: A baby's shoe.)

1 small chair at desk up Right.

1 small writing desk (or bureau.)

1 set of corner shelves. (Up Right as described, with photos, vase, and books as desired.)

1 small round table. (Right—partially decorated.)

1 "milking" stool. (Down Right.)

1 upright piano. (Up Center.) On it: A bowl of flowers. Tea caddy. Work basket. Tradesmens' books. Keys.

1 hand-painted drainpipe (Right of piano.)

1 music cabinet. (Left of piano.)

1 piano stool.

1 book-case. (Up Left.)

1 sofa, with loose cushions. (Left Center.)

1 small table. (Above sofa.) On it: Low flower bowl.

1 low, small easy chair. (Down Left.)

Brass fender.

Fire-irons.

Coal scuttle.

Mantel. (Draped as described.) On it: Clock. Indian ornaments. Vase with yellow flowers.

1 long fire-stool.

On doors: Curtains hung on brass poles, and decorated as described.

Special Properties: (Act I.)

On chair Right of table: Trouser leg, partially embroidered.

On fire-stool: Embroidered cloth bag. Hair brush. Comb.

Personal:

AMY: Towel.

COSMO: Telegram. (Ready off: Cadet's hat. A. B. C. Guide.)

COLONEL: Pipe, pouch, matches.

FANNY: Tray, with tea set, sandwiches, cakes, for two persons.

(The above properties for Act I.)

Special Properties: (Act III.)

COSMO: (To wear.) Black leather slippers.

(Ready off.) Black uniform boots.

GINEVRA: Book. (On piano stool.) Hat and cloak.

COLONEL: Pipe, pouch, matches, as before.

STEVE: Hat and gloves.

ACT II

Carpet on stage. Rug at fire-place. Strip on landing. Heavy dark curtains at window. (Closed.)

1 3-flap table. (Left.) On it: White table cloth. Entree dish containing one chop. Potato and vegetable dish. Gravy boat. Plate for sweet. Glass jug of water. Tumbler. Knives, forks, spoons, condiment set, as required.

3 small chairs at table.

1 sofa. (Right.) With loose cushions.

1 small table above sofa. On it: Book. Cigarette box. Ash tray.

1 small table Right of sofa. On it: Box of cigars. Matches. Ash tray.

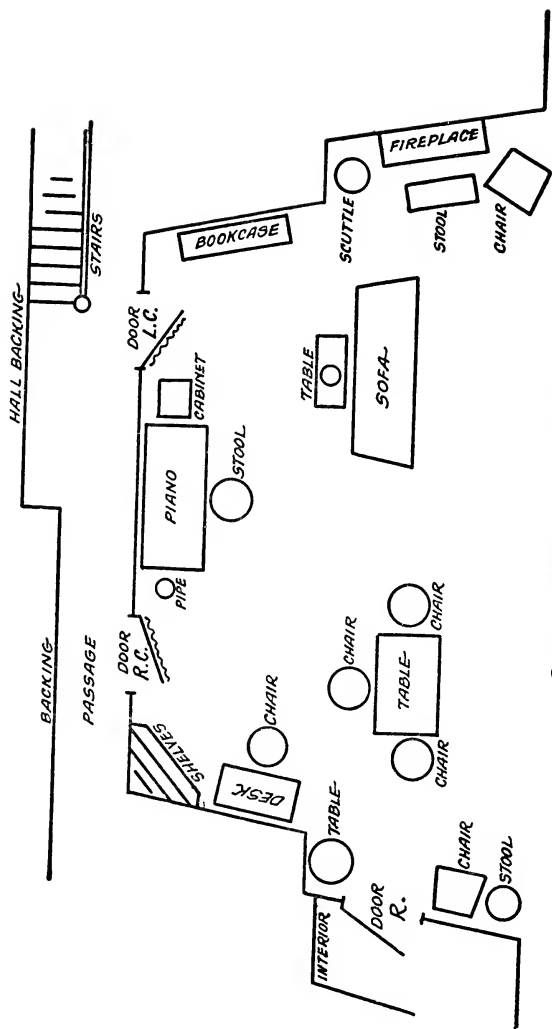
1 small easy chair (Down Right.)

- 1 book case. (Up Right.)
 Mantel. On it: Clock. Two large ornaments. Ash tray.
 1 sideboard. (Up Right Center.) On it: Biscuit barrel.
 Siphon of soda. Tantalus.
 1 deep cupboard. (Or pantry built in.) In it: Shelves
 with some crockery, etc., including dinner plates.
 Club fenders, fire-irons, scuttle.
 1 grandfather clock. (Up Left.)
 1 small oblong table. (Down Left.) On wall above it:
 Framed photo of school cricket team.

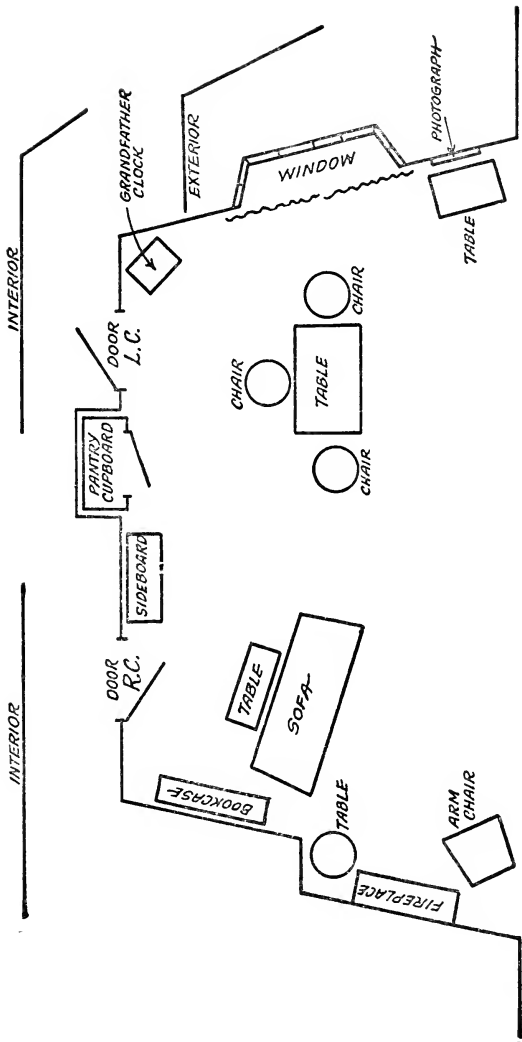
Personal:

- RICHARDSON: Large tray.
 STEVE: Novel. Pipe. Pouch. Matches.
 COLONEL: Hat. Coat. Scarf.
 AMY: Special cloak over evening dress. Gloves.
 ALICE: Lace, or silk Indian scarf for head.

NOTE: *The above plots include all essentials. The stage dressings may be elaborated as the producer desires, and so far as the author's intentions is conveyed.*



SCENE DESIGN -- ACTS I & III
 "ALICE - SIT-BY - THE-FIRE"



SCENE DESIGN -- ACT II
 "ALICE-SIT-BY-THE-FIRE"

RING AROUND ELIZABETH

Comedy. 3 acts. By Charl Armstrong. 5 males, 7 females. Interior. Modern costumes.

This entertaining comedy was first produced in New York with Jane Cowl in the starring role. Elizabeth is the hard-taxed center of an irritating household. Her husband is a dullard; one of her daughters is hysterically in love with a cynical playboy; the other is very stridently precocious. There's a selfish old mother who hoards antiques and a fussy father-in-law who chases fires. And most of these people are worse than usual because they are panting after a legacy that Elizabeth has received. Having reached the breaking point, Elizabeth contracts a nice case of amnesia, in which twenty years are blotted out. This enables her not only to indulge in caprices like taking up with her daughter's young man, but also to tell all the members of the family what she thinks of them. All of these doings show results that promise well for the future of Elizabeth and her family. "Buoyant charm and professional dexterity."—*New York Sun*. "We are grateful to you for giving us this splendid play."—Sister Mary, Superior, House of Good Shepherd, Philadelphia.

(Royalty, \$25.00.)

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

Comedy. 3 acts. By Francis Swann. 7 males, 5 females. Interior. Modern costumes.

Six young people are sharing an apartment. They are would-be stage folk driven to this co-operative scheme by the lack of economic security. The apartment they rent is immediately above that of a Broadway producer who is about to cast a road company. They rehearse the play which he is currently producing, but the problem is—how to get him upstairs to see it? Now, it so happens that the producer is an amateur chef, and he comes upstairs to borrow some flour. At last! They stage a murder scene. It is so realistic that police swarm into the scene and the misunderstanding becomes hilarious when it is discovered the girl who is playing the corpse has been served a knockout drink. However, in spite of everything, it looks as if the future might hold some promise for the youngsters. Highly recommended. "It is gross understatement to say that our production of *Out of the Frying Pan* was a sure-fire hit'. It was more than that: it was a tornado."—John I. Carlson, High School, Ashland, Ohio.

(Royalty, \$25.00.)

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PETER PAN

by J. M. BARRIE

Fantasy—3 Acts

25 Characters—Scenes: the Nursery, Never Land
(In-three: Land, Sea, House Beneath), Deck of a Ship.

The everlasting classic account of a boy and a girl who follow Peter Pan and the invisible fairy, Tinker Bell, into Never Land, where children never grow old and where Captain Hook and his pirates are outwitted. Performed by Maude Adams, Jean Arthur, Mary Martin. "The magic is as great as ever."—*N.Y. Daily News*.

Price, \$1.25. (Royalty, \$35-\$25.)

THE WIZARD OF OZ

by ELIZABETH F. GOODSPEED

Fantasy—3 Acts

Dramatized from the story of L. Frank Baum.

The only authorized dramatic version.

14 Characters, Extras—Scenes: a Farmyard, a Road,
a Kitchen, 2 Throne Rooms.

Dorothy finds herself in the land of the Munchkins, and must journey to see the Wizard of Oz. Her path takes her past fantastic places, and endears her to the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion along the way. Each receives his dearest wish after the long journey.

Price, \$1.25. (Royalty, \$25-\$20.)